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AUNT PATTY.

AUNT PATTY'S

SCRAP-BAG.

BY

MRS. CAROLINE LEE HENTZ.

AUTHOR OF "LINDA," "MARCUS WARLAND," "PLANTER'S NORTHERN BRIDE," "LOST DAUGHTER," "RENA," "ROBERT GRAHAM," "BANISHED SON," "ERNEST LINWOOD," "COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE," "EOLINE," "LOVE AFTER MARRIAGE," "HELEN AND ARTHUR," ETC.

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AUNT PATTY'S SCRAP-BAG.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

THE family of Mr. Worth sat in silence around the breakfast-table. It was an unusual thing; and one who had been accustomed to the cheerfulness that generally prevailed in the domestic circle would have wondered at the stillness, and even sadness, that reigned at a board covered with all the necessaries and many of the luxuries of life. It was, indeed, an inviting board. The cloth was white as the snow, which still lay in unmelted drifts on the northern side of the dwelling; the butter was fresh from the churn, with an impression of roses, which no one had yet defaced by a knife; the rolls were so light and white, they looked as if they had foamed up in the oven and petrified there; honey that might have been extracted from the flowers of Canaan, from its sweet-

ness and clearness, looked temptingly from a transparent dish; and buckwheat cakes, palpitating and smoking from the griddle, every pore filled with melted butter, were passed round the table, yet none but the younger children extended their fork, moved by a spirit of appropriation. Yes, there was one more, and that was Aunt Patty, who sat on the right side of Mrs. Worth, near the hissing coffee urn, and who never suffered sentiment to interfere with the duties of life—and of all its duties, she considered none of more importance and dignity than those connected with the science of gastronomy. While the family thus sit in silence, and most of them in idleness, we will avail ourselves of the opportunity of description, and present them individually before the reader. Let us pay honor where honor is due, and commence with Mrs. Worth, who sat at the head of the table, where she usually presided, the image of smiling hospitality; but this morning there was no smile on her face, and every now and then a tear was seen gathering in her eye, which she tried to force back, but the utmost her efforts could accomplish was to prevent the gathering drops from falling in a shower. She was a handsome woman, or rather a lovely one, and in early youth must have been

beautiful. In her bright and sunny moments her cheek still wore a spring-like bloom, but now it was pale, and that wanness and languor which proceeds from a restless and sleepless night was diffused over her whole countenance. She had that soft gray eye which we always associate with our idea of a religious character—that color which lightens and darkens, like the clouds of heaven, in the sunshine and shadow of the heart. Her hair, of pale chestnut-brown, was parted on her brow, and brought down somewhat low over temples which needed their shade to relieve their lofty proportions. The plain divided hair was also relieved by the border of a thin lace cap, ornamented by a pale rose-coloured ribbon. It was the colour her husband best loved, and she seldom wore any other. On her right side, as if to serve as a foil to her unfaded matron charms, sat Aunt Patty, her own maternal aunt, whose countenance gave one an idea of extreme goodness from its excessive homeliness. Her nose was very large, particularly at the end and about the regions of the nostrils, and, it is probable, the consciousness of possessing unusual accommodations for the business, induced her to adopt the profession of snuff-taking. But, whatever was the exciting motive, she was the very queen of snuff-

takers, and the number and variety of her fancy snuff-boxes were the admiration of all the children of the neighbourhood. She had a box deposited by her plate with the picture of Bonaparte in full regimentals on the top of it, whose nose was almost obliterated by incessant rapping. A crutch rested against her chair, which showed she was lame; and as her figure leaned painfully toward the right, it was evident that she needed support on that side. She had been a cripple from early childhood, and having been cut off from all the active enjoyments of life, had acquired an inordinate love of reading, though her taste was of rather a peculiar kind.

But we will not enter now into the minutiæ of mind. We are treating of externals, and there is a large family to dispose of before we can be admitted into the penetralia, or inner sanctuary. There is another peculiarity of Aunt Patty's. She eats with her left hand alone—her right lies passive in her lap. Its sinews are contracted, and the skin looks dry and withered. When a child she fell into the fire, when left to the charge of a faithless nurse, and the tender ligaments were scorched, the soft muscles hardened and the vigorous growth stunted. It may be that her irregularities of feature were caused by the same misfortune; the blood

having less power in one part of the system rioted too madly in another, and produced many little excrescences, such as warts and moles, which gave a striking individuality to Aunt Patty's appearance.

Notwithstanding her total destitution of personal attractions, Aunt Patty was an object of great tenderness and affection to her kindred and intimate acquaintances. Unlike many who are visited by similar calamities, and who are made selfish and hard and suspicious, she had all the disinterestedness and simplicity of a child. But it will never do to dwell so long on Aunt Patty, on her first introduction to the reader, though we acknowledge that she is an especial favourite.

There is a little chubby-faced, fat-armed, rosy-cheeked, curly-haired thing, seated up in a high chair, close to her side, who looks impatient to attract our notice. That is Estelle, the young star of the group, and the cloud that broods over every other face has cast no dimness on hers. It would be impossible for her to look sad. Her face is too round, her cheeks too rosy and her eyes too blue and bright. Her upper lip is too short entirely to conceal her ivory teeth, so she cannot help smiling if she would; and her little nose, *un peu retroussé*,

gives an air of inexpressible mischief to her countenance. She is Aunt Patty's pet, who would think the sun and moon well appropriated were they plucked from the sky to gratify the wishes of Estelle. Her dish is piled up with a heap of buckwheat cakes almost as high as her head, swimming in an ocean of honey as well as butter, which Aunt Patty has provided for her darling, taking advantage of the sad and abstracted mood of the mother, who generally restricts the appetites of the children within the bounds of propriety. But Aunt Patty thinks that nature is the best guide, and that children ought to eat as long as they can swallow; and there is no doubt that the dawning intellect of Estelle was often impeded in its operations by the injudicious indulgence of her privileged relative.

There is a great contrast between the fair, sunny-eyed Estelle and the dark, gloomy-browed youth seated on her right. Who would dream that he is her own brother, the son of that gentle mother? Yet it is even so, and the same blood that seems to bubble up in her cherub-cheeks flows like molten lead in his veins. He has the lofty brow of his mother and the firm-set lips of his father, but his eyes are all his own; large, dark and sullen, yet lustrous in their gloom, they remind one of a

lantern in a dark abbey, or a torch in a dark pine wood, the flash making the shades more deep by contrast. The expression of misanthropy, which is the prevailing character of his countenance, he has worn from early childhood, and it now settles like a thick fog on the bloom of his adolescence. He is the Esau of the family, who believes there is no blessing for him. He seldom sits down at the domestic board, and nothing but an occasion like the present would induce him to depart from his gloomy and retired habits. Homer has the right of primogeniture, but he imagines his younger brother has robbed him of his birthright, and had he hated the world less, he might have become an alien from the paternal roof. The eyes of the father are now fixed upon him with an expression of intense anxiety. Homer frowns under a consciousness of the steadfast look. He has a horror of being gazed upon, and meeting at the same time the tearful glance of his mother, he rises suddenly and leaves the table.

Mr. Worth was a man of remarkable dignity of appearance and manner. His figure was tall and stately, surmounted by a Roman bust and Brutus head. He was said to resemble the best pictures of Washington, that is, in the somewhat square

outline of the face and the large sockets of the eyes; but the eyes themselves were larger and darker, and had more fire and tenderness, and the hue of his complexion and hair were both exceedingly dark. His smile was singularly fine, contrasting as it did with the prevailing gravity of his countenance. Little Estelle said, "when father smiled, it looked like the sun shining out from behind a cloud." Aunt Patty treasured this up among the many smart sayings that indicated her favourite's precious genius. If the children hailed their father's smiles as the breaking sunbeams, they feared his frowns of anger more than the wrath of elements. He was seldom angry, and never without a just cause; and he had such perfect mastery of his own passions, that even when unchained he could make them the vassals of his will. His influence in his own family, in the neighbourhood—indeed, as far as he was known—was irresistible. It was the combined influence of a commanding intellect, uncompromising principles, enlarged philanthropy and the kindliest sensibilities; and it is no wonder that such an union should have strength. His name became him well. It was a compendium of his whole character.

A pale young girl, of about twelve, sat on the

right of her father, whose name was Emma; she was the eldest daughter of the household, and bore a striking resemblance to her father, though a constitutional delicacy of complexion gave a softness to features which might have otherwise seemed too decided in their outline. She had a slender chest, drooping shoulders, a small, bright flush on her cheeks and eyes too large in proportion to the rest of her face. But they were so brilliant, so spiritual, so unchildish in their expression, that, with her fragile frame and delicate, flushed complexion, her appearance was uncommonly interesting. You could read her history in her countenance from the cradle to the present hour. A feeble infant, apparently destined for a grave not more than a span long, a child of many tender cares and trembling hopes, hopes becoming steadier and stronger as time passed on without realizing the fears which often overshadowed those trembling hopes. She was the young moralist of the family, and sickness had given her such sanctity in the eyes of the younger children that they looked upon her as more angel than mortal, as one who had wings on her shoulders ready to unfurl in the golden light of heaven.

Seated between Emma and Bessy, the younger sister, was Edmund, the Jacob whom the misan-

thropic Homer suspected and envied. "In truth, young Edmund was no vulgar boy." There seemed an innate nobility about him that spoke in his walk, in his bow, in the manner in which he put on his hat, or moved a chair, which the stranger-guest always noticed and admired. Then there was such sunniness and vivacity in his countenance, such winning frankness and glowing warmth; his face was like a bright spring morning, all radiance and bloom. His mother said that Edmund had never given her heart one moment's pain from disobedience, obstinacy, or passion; and Aunt Patty said he came into the world with the commandments written on his heart, and that there was no need of his learning them. It was not often that a shadow flitted over his soul-lighted brow; but one rested there now, and it had deepened since Homer's abrupt departure from the table. Indeed, that circumstance had added to the evident depression of the family group.

Bessy, the younger sister of Emma, the foster-child of Hygeia, looked like no one in the world but herself, and no one who saw her could wish her to look otherwise. She was very fair, and had that Grecian outline of face and feature so beautiful in profile. Her eyes were of a clear cerulean,

such as you see in a summer morning, and they had a natural lifting towards heaven, as if conscious of their consanguinity with the beautiful azure of the skies. Then her hair! who ever saw such lovely ringlets? They were of a flaxen colour—not that dry, dingy flaxen, such as is seen on the heads of children who roll about all day in the hot sun, but a bright, golden texture that sparkled and rippled in its own joyous freedom. Bessy was an ardent, imaginative child, and she loved to watch the clouds at sunset and to tell her dreams in the morning. The other children called her Aunt Elinor, because Aunt Elinor, in that famous book, "Sir Charles Grandison," was the dream-teller of the novel. Not that they had read that voluminous work themselves, but they had heard it, revised and corrected, from the lips of Aunt Patty, who was unequalled in her oral powers. It was the first morning for a long time that Bessy had not entertained the family with some vision more dazzling and wonderful than all the creations of the Arabian Nights, the oracle of her imagination. But it is not probable she had any dreams to tell. She looked as if she had scarcely slept, and a pink circle round her eyes betrayed the tears which had been resting there.

But why, it may naturally be asked, this unusual silence and sadness and traces of recent tears? It may be told in a few words. The husband and father was about to depart on a long journey. He expected to be absent a long time on perplexing business; and, moreover, he was going to the far South, to be exposed to a dangerous climate—peculiarly dangerous to a man of his vigorous constitution. He was going on horseback, for he could not bear the confinement of a stage when he could ride in the open air on his good horse Faithful, who had carried him safely over many a rough and weary road. His trunks had already been forwarded, and his valise lay ready in a chair to be strapped on the back of Faithful, who, if he could have been conscious of the treasures it contained, would have exulted under the burden. Had there been room the children would have loaded him with bushels of apples and nuts and cakes, to regale the traveller; as it was, they mourned bitterly over the narrow limits prescribed to them, and wished valises were made of India rubber, so that they could be stretched as wide as one wished. Estelle was extremely desirous to pack up her gray and white kitten for her father's amusement, but when he convinced her that it would die for want of air, her solicitude for her kitten con-

quered her filial anxiety. She persuaded him, however, to take a china kitten, which had been her pet before she had a present of the live one, as there was no danger of smothering it and it would occupy very little room.

Emma, who was celebrated for her skill as a seamstress, had for some time been sedulously engaged in making up some fine linen shirts for her father, in which she would allow no one to put one stitch but herself. Not satisfied with the multitudinous and superfluous stitches which custom requires should be used in the manufacture of such garments, she was embroidering the gussets and hemstitching the bosoms in all the luxuriance of ornamental affection, when he convinced her that there was great danger of his being taken up as an ultra dandy, and she was obliged to content herself with greater simplicity of execution.

Bessy had been knitting a pair of dark worsted gloves with an ivory hook, which, after some unexpected difficulties, were completed to the satisfaction of her father, if not to her own. The first glove was too small, but he said it was not of any consequence, for it would stretch; the next was too large, but he was equally sure that it would shrink. This kind of reasoning reminded Bessy of the

traveller who warmed his fingers and cooled his broth with the same breath. But when she saw the gloves upon his hands, without presenting much apparent discrepancy, she was satisfied of the soundness of his arguments. They were a very acceptable gift, as the chill winds of March were blowing and the traveller needed every comfort to shield him from their northern blasts.

Aunt Patty had put an ample snuff-box in the corner of his valise and told him he must take a pinch of snuff every night in memorial of her, and he must bring her the prettiest box in all Carolina as a keepsake in return. Aunt Patty made another request, which he promised to remember, and, as far as it was practicable, obey. One of her darling hobbies was to collect pieces of calico, muslin and silk, samples of the dresses of all her friends and acquaintances, and every once in a while she would open her scrap-bag and review her treasures, telling the names of the individuals who wore such and such frocks, and relating many choice anecdotes connected with the circumstances under which the specimens were obtained. She gave positive injunctions to Mr. Worth to preserve relics of the dresses of all the ladies with whom he became ac-

quainted, to add to her already vast collection. She anticipated a rich feast in comparing the colour, texture and figure of the materials which compose a Southern lady's wardrobe, imagining it must be entirely different from her Northern sisters. This was such an innocent recreation to Aunt Patty, and her sources of enjoyment were so limited, and it was such a delight to the children to gather round her knees and hear the history of the parti-coloured shreds which lay like a broken rainbow in her lap, that Mr. Worth himself took no small pleasure in thinking he should have an opportunity of adding to her already immense hoard. She gave him a large reception bag in which to deposit the precious morceaus, with many directions to learn everything possible connected with the wearers of the garments, that the increase in her historical lore might be in proportion to the accession of her wealth. "Well," said she, breaking the silence and trying to coax Estelle with a fresh roll, who leaned back in her high chair in a state of perfect repletion, "there is no use in looking so sad. The world is made up of partings and meetings, and if people never parted they would never know the comfort of meeting again. It is well to go away sometimes just to know how good home is. We must only

trust in Providence and all will go right where-ever we may be."

"Yes, Aunt Patty," replied Mr. Worth, with a slight huskiness of voice, "you have uttered volumes in that little phrase. The belief in a guardian Providence, that not only watches over me, but mine, will be my best consolation during the lonely hours of absence. My wife, my children, you must remember that I shall watch the coming of the mail as the approach of a good angel, and you must not let it come without tokens of love for me."

"There is no need of reminding me as a duty of what will be my chief happiness," replied Mrs. Worth, half reproachfully. "I only fear that I shall occupy too much of your time. You know, in my own family, they called me the scribbler, and I have not forfeited the title."

"You are blest with the pen of a ready writer," said the husband, "and can speak from the heart to the heart most eloquently. There are many who are charming companions when present, who are cold and careless in absence. Letter-writing is an accomplishment of priceless value—one in which the best qualities of the head and heart are called into exercise. I wish my children to cultivate it in

a high degree. They can have no better opportunity than addressing an absent and loving father. You fear my criticism? Well, I acknowledge I am rather an unmerciful critic, but it is only by the exposure of your errors you will improve. I place my standard of excellence very high, and you must all strive to attain it. Yet be not discouraged—simplicity, truth and vivacity are the best qualities in a correspondent, and little Estelle herself can boast of these, and would write an admirable letter if her chirography were equal to her intelligence."

"Chirography!" repeated Aunt Patty—"you don't expect the child to understand such a word as that. I always think it best to use short words in speaking to children."

"You can explain it to her, Aunt Patty," said Edmund, rather archly, for he well knew that though Aunt Patty was a devourer of books, she saw no necessity of understanding the meaning of every word she read herself, and when she saw a long word she was apt to skip it. "But, father," continued he, "mother will tell you all the good and great things in her long letters, and there will be none but little, insignificant trifles for us to relate."

"You are mistaken, my boy, if you think great things are necessary to give interest to an epistle

from home. The slightest incident, the description of the daily minutiæ of life, a walk in the woods, a visit to or from a friend, a sketch of the book you are reading, the drawing you are making, possess a charm which young letter-writers cannot imagine, or they would never strain after such unnatural subjects and artificial style as they sometimes do. Even a dream, my Bessy, such as has often enlivened our family breakfast-table, would be quite captivating at times. You must all write as if you were my only correspondent, and be not afraid of repeating the same thing twice, for you will all relate it in a different manner, and that will prevent it from being tedious. I expect a great deal from my young moralist here, who can turn even the frolics of Estelle's kitten into sources of instruction."

Emma blushed, and the children began to reflect a great deal on the importance of letter-writing, and of the materials they intended to collect to fill their future pages. They felt elevated in their own estimation since they found their father looked to them for intellectual amusement, and they resolved that no link should be wanting in the chain of events wrought during his absence, but that it should receive brightness and beauty from their

touch. They became, in a measure, reconciled to his departure, and a gleam of sunshine broke through the cloud which had lowered over the household shrine. The long, gloomy silence being once broken, conversation flowed more easily and cheerfully, and they all, by tacit understanding, lingered as long as possible round the table, knowing their rising would be the signal for his departure.

"There is one caution, Aunt Patty," said Mr. Worth, "which I must mention, and you must not be displeased." Here one of his rare smiles gleamed on his countenance, and Aunt Patty smiled from sympathy, though she knew not its meaning. "Now," added he, "you want your darling Estelle to be a beauty, a wit, and a genius, but if you pamper her appetite as you now do she will be nothing but a gross little animal, with eyes standing out with fatness and head as heavy as an apple-dumpling. Show your love to her in any other way; give her red-headed pins, buttonwood balls, or any of your peculiar gifts, but don't drown her in butter or honey or stuff her with rolls and hot cakes."

"If it's the fashion to starve children now," replied Aunt Patty, "to make them bright, it wasn't

when I was young. I was always allowed to eat what I wanted, and it never hurt my intellect."

"But all minds may not possess such a preservative principle as yours, Aunt Patty. At any rate, attend to my wishes in this respect and I will put every lady I see under contribution for your calico museum. Edmund, find your brother; I must see him again before I bid you farewell. That unhappy boy," added he in a low voice to his wife as they together left the apartment, "I fear he will hang heavy on your heart during my absence."

"Deal gently with him, my husband," said the mother; "a word, a mere breath, wounds his sensitive and too exacting spirit. Do not upbraid him for his strange and abrupt manners: a word of reproof now would rankle in his bosom for months. We must be very, very tender with him, if we would not alienate him entirely from our affections."

"Ah! my beloved Emma," replied he, "I fear the very excess of your tenderness has a pernicious influence on his character. It fosters that morbid, selfish sensibility which preys darkly on itself, and converts into wormwood and gall the very life-blood of his heart. I perceive he is in one of his darkest moods, and I cannot leave him without making a more strenuous effort than I have ever

done before to rouse him from the moral sepulchre in which he is entombing himself. Do not fear: I will address him with all the tenderness of a mother, mingled with the authority of a father; and if I cannot move his sullen temper I will take him with me rather than the peace of my household should be disturbed by his strange paroxysms of passion."

"Oh, never!" exclaimed Mrs. Worth; "he would be wretched among strangers, and so great would be his reluctance that you would be compelled to use coercion to force obedience to your will. Though you fear the effects of too much tenderness, I have no words to express my dread of the consequences of such a course. If one human being has more influence over him than another, I believe it is myself, and I know he will not willingly add to the sorrow caused by this long separation."

Mrs. Worth hung on her husband's arm as she spoke and looked beseechingly in his eyes. She pleaded the cause of her first-born with all a mother's eloquence. Much as her own heart condemned him, she could not bear that others should speak with severity of his faults. She seemed conscious that instead of winning, he repelled from him, the affections and sympathies of his kind, and

she wanted to make up to him in the prodigality of a mother's love for the forfeited esteem of the world. So unceasing, so shielding, was her watchful observance of him that many misinterpreted her feelings and believed him her favourite child, more especially as she often repressed the gushings of her maternal heart toward Edmund, her beautiful and beloved, lest the demon of jealousy that lay like a sleeping lion in the breast of Homer should leap from its lair.

Unable to control or conceal her agitation, Mrs. Worth left the apartment from an opposite door as Homer entered and stood before his father with folded arms and sullen brow.

Mr. Worth remained silent a few moments with his left hand in his breast and his right supported by the back of a chair. It was his usual attitude, and as it presented his person in its full height, it enhanced its commanding dignity. The struggle to master his emotions gave a sternness to his countenance of which he was not aware, and Homer felt he was arraigned before a judge rather than a father, and he resolved to meet him in the spirit of a man.

"My son," said Mr. Worth, "I wished to speak with you a few moments apart from the rest of

the family, and I would speak with the solemnity of one who may never have an opportunity of addressing you again. On the eve of parting from objects inexpressibly dear, anxieties, heavy before, press upon me with the weight of iron. I go in the hope of establishing my claims to an inheritance which will place my children in affluence and give them an influence in society which merit and talent alone could not impart. You are my first-born son, and, though a mere boy in years, are fast acquiring the stature of a man. Your mind has grown beyond your years, and were its energies well directed it might become at some future day a mighty engine to work out your country's good. Bnt the same power compressed in its limits may be terrible. Like the tiger that chafes in impotent strength against the bars of its cage, it lashes itself to fury, and is wasted itself at last in ineffectual efforts. You like strong expressions, and I use them. You do not like to be treated as a child, and I place in you the confidence of a man. For your sake, more than for my other children, do I involve myself in the intricacies of law and sacrifice the comforts of home. You, as my eldest born, will be my representative, and society will look to you to keep up the honour of a name

known and respected through many generations. The higher your fortunes the greater your responsibilities. My son, I wish you to feel them as you ought."

"No, father," replied Homer, gloomily; "it is not for me to sustain your name and fame. You have another son, younger, it is true, but a great deal more gifted and more beloved than I am. Let Edmund have all the money, since he has stolen everything else."

"And who told you, unhappy boy, that Edmund had supplanted you in our affections? What proofs of love has he received which have not been lavished on you? Oh, Homer, my heart bleeds for your perverseness. And there is another heart, still more tender and fond than mine, that throbs with unutterable anxiety on your account. You were the first that opened the overflowing fountain of parental love in our bosoms, that fountain which no ingratitude can chill, no exactions can drain. We love Edmund no better than yourself. There is an evil spirit within you which whispers bad lessons to your secret soul. Beware, Homer; it is the same spirit that instigated Cain to envy, hate, then murder his unoffending brother, and bathed the green turf of Eden in kindred blood. The

same spirit which urged the jealous brothers of Joseph to all their dark and cruel deeds. Beware, lest it wind you, body and soul, in its serpent folds."

Homer turned very pale and his under lip quivered with emotion. He averted his head, but not before his father saw large, scalding tears plashing like rain-drops on his cheek. Mr. Worth could man himself against his sullen, defying mood, but this unexpected burst of sensibility melted him at once. Taking his hand and drawing him closely to him, he attempted to speak, but the effort was ineffectual. Homer's long pent-up feelings having once broke loose were ungovernable. He leaned his head on his father's shoulder and, in the strong language of Scripture, "lifted up his voice and wept aloud." "Oh, my son," exclaimed his father, when he once more obtained the mastery of his voice, "never since the hour when I first received you a new-born babe in my arms has my heart yearned over you as it does at this moment. Promise me, then, in the strength of awakened confidence and affection, that you will make during my absence the happiness of your mother your first object—that of your brothers and sisters your next. Promise, with God's help, that

if I should return no more, and this house should become the home of the widow and the fatherless, that you will be their stay and pillar, their shield and consolation."

Homer grasped his father's hands and uplifting his eyes repeated the promise he required. Good angels were hovering near, and the evil spirit fled from the music of their rustling wings. The father and son went out together hand in hand, and when the mother met them she knew that all was well between them, and she was sustained in the trying moment of separation.

The thousand adieus were spoken, the farewell embraces given, and the traveller, mounted on the back of Faithful, who had also received many an affectionate caress, passed from the loved shadow of the homestead. The wife retired to her chamber that she might veil her grief in secrecy; the children stood at the door and followed with wistful gaze the stately figure of their father till the last glimpse of his dark-blue riding-dress disappeared beneath the arch of two meeting elms. The voice of Aunt Patty called them back into the breakfast-room.

"You must never look after a person as long as you can see them," said she, with mournful empha-

sis; "it is a sure sign that you will never see them again."

"Oh, don't say so, Aunt Patty!" exclaimed Bessy, with a fresh burst of tears; "we have all been looking after him as long as we could see his shadow on the snow."

A reverential belief in signs and omens was another of Aunt Patty's individualities; and in these Bessy had more faith than the other children, for Aunt Patty was the interpreter of her dreams and invested them with a prophetic dignity, at least in her own eyes.

CHAPTER II.

AUNT PATTY'S STORY.

IT was a rainy day—a real old-fashioned, orthodox rainy day. It rained the first thing in the morning, it rained harder and harder at midday. The afternoon was drawing to a close, and still the rain came down in steady and persevering drops, every drop falling in a decided and obstinate way, as if conscious, though it might be ever so unwelcome, no one had a right to oppose its coming. A rainy day in midsummer is a glorious thing. The grass looks up so green and grateful under the life-giving moisture; the flowers send forth such a delicious aroma; the tall forest trees bend down their branches so gracefully in salutation to the messengers of heaven. There are beauty, grace and glory in a midsummer rain, and the spirit of man becomes gay and buoyant under its influence. But a March rain in New England, when the vane of the weather-cock points inveterately to the north-east, when the brightness and purity and *positive-*

ness of winter is gone and not one promise of spring breaks cheeringly on the eye, is a dismal concern.

Little Estelle stood looking out at the window, with her nose pressed against a pane of glass, wishing it would clear up, it was so pretty to see the sun break out just as he was setting. The prospect abroad was not very inviting. It was a patch of mud and a patch of snow, the dirtiest mixture in nature's olio. A little boy went slumping by, sinking at every step almost to his knees; then a carriage slowly and majestically came plashing along, its wheels buried in mud, the horses labouring and straining and every now and then shaking the slime indignantly from their fetlocks, and probably thinking none but amphibious animals should be abroad in such weather.

"Oh! it is such an ugly, ugly day!" said Estelle; "I do wish it were over."

"You should not find fault with the weather," replied Emma; "mother says it is wicked, for God sends us what weather seemeth good to him. For my part, I have had a very happy day reading and sewing."

"And I too," said Bessy, "but I begin to be tired now, and I wish I could see some of those

beautiful crimson clouds, tinged with gold, that wait upon sunset."

"Bessy has such a romantic mode of expression," cried Edmund, laughing and laying down his book; "I think she will make a poet one of these days. Even now, I see upon her lips 'a prophetess's fire.'"

Bessy's blue eyes peeped at her brother through her golden curls, and something in them seemed to say, "that is not such a ridiculous prophecy as you imagine."

"This is a dreadful day for a traveller," said Mrs. Worth with a sigh, and the children all thought of their father exposed to the inclemency of the atmosphere, and they echoed their mother's sigh. They all looked very sad till the entrance of another member of the family turned their thoughts into a new channel. This was no other than Estelle's kitten, which had been perambulating in the mire and rain till she looked the most forlorn object in the world. Her sides were hollow and dripping, and her tail clung to her back in a most abject manner. There was a simultaneous exclamation at her dishevelled appearance, but Miss Kitty walked on as demurely as if nothing particular had happened to her, and jump-

ing on her little mistress's shoulder, curled her wet tail round her ears and began to mew and purr, opening and shutting her green eyes between every purr. Much as Estelle loved her favourite, she was not at all pleased at her present proximity and called out energetically for deliverance. All laughed long and heartily at the muddy streaks on her white neck and the muddy tracks on her white apron, and she looked as if she had not made up her mind whether to laugh or cry when a fresh burst of laughter produced a complete reaction, and a sudden shower of tears fell precipitately on Aunt Patty's lap.

"Take care, Estelle," said Edmund; "Aunt Patty has got on her thunder-and-lightning calico. She does not like to have it rained on."

Aunt Patty had a favourite frock, the ground-work of which was a deep brown, with zig-zag streaks of scarlet darting over it. Estelle called it thunder and lightning, and certainly it was a very appropriate similitude for a child. It always was designated by that name, and Edmund declared that whenever Aunt Patty wore that dress it was sure to bring a storm. She was now solicited by many voices to bring out one of her scrap-bags for their amusement. And she, who never wearied of

recalling the bright images of her youthful fancy or the impressions of later years, produced a gigantic satchel, and undrawing the strings, Estelle's little hand was plunged in, and grasping a piece by chance, smiles played like sunbeams on her tears when she found it was a relic of old Parson Broomfield's banian. It consisted of broad shaded stripes of an iron-gray colour, a very sober and ministerial-looking calico. "Ah!" said Aunt Patty, the chords of memory wakened to music at the sight; "I remember the time when I first saw Parson Broomfield wear that banian. I was a little girl then, and my mother used to send me on errands here and there in a little carriage made purposely for me on account of my lameness. A boy used to draw me in the same way that they do infants, and everybody stopped and said something to the poor lame girl. I was going by the parsonage one warm summer morning, and the parson was sitting reading under a large elm tree that grew directly in front of his door. He had a bench put all round the trunk so that weary travellers could stop and rest under its shade. He was a blessed man, Parson Broomfield, of such great piety that some thought if they could touch the hem of his garment they would have a passport to heaven. I

always think of him when I read that beautiful verse in Job: 'The young men saw him and trembled, the aged arose and stood up.' Well, there he sat that warm summer morning, in his new striped banian, turned back from his neck, and turned carelessly over one knee to keep it from sweeping on the grass. He had on black satin lasting pantaloons and a black velvet waistcoat that made his shirt collar look as white as snow. He lifted his eyes when he heard the wheels of my carriage rolling along and made a sort of motion for me to stop. 'Good morning, little Patty,' said he; 'I hope you are very well this beautiful morning.' We always thought it an honour to get a word from his lips, and I felt as if I could walk without a crutch the whole day. He was very kind to little children, though he looked so grand and holy in the pulpit you would think he was an angel of light just come down there from the skies."

"Did he preach in that calico frock?" asked Emma, anxious for the dignity of the ministerial office.

"Oh no, child—all in solemn black, except his white linen bands. He always looked like a saint on Sunday, walking into the church so slow and

stately, yet bowing on the right and left to the old white-headed men that waited for him as for the consolation of Israel. Oh, he was a blessed man, and he is in glory now. Here," added she, taking a piece of spotless linen from a white folded paper, "is a remnant of the good man's shroud. I saw him when he was laid out, with his hands folded on his breast and his Bible resting above them."

"Don't they have any Bibles in heaven?" asked little Estelle, shrinking from contact with the funereal sample.

"No, child; they will read there without books, and see without eyes, and know everything without learning. But they put his Bible on his heart because he loved it so in life, and it seemed to be company for him in the dark coffin and lonely grave."

The children looked serious, and Emma's wistful eyes, lifted towards heaven, seemed to long for that region of glorious intuition whither the beloved pastor of Aunt Patty's youth was gone. Then the youngest begged her to tell them something more lively, as talking about death and the coffin and the grave made them melancholy such a rainy day.

"Here," said Bessy, "is a beautiful pink-and-

white muslin. The figure is a half-open rosebud, with a delicate cluster of leaves. Who had a dress like this, Aunt Patty?"

"That was the dress your mother wore the first time she saw your father," answered the chronicler, with a significant smile. Bessy clasped her hands with delight, and they all gathered close to gaze upon an object associated with such an interesting era.

"Didn't she look sweet?" said Bessy, looking admiringly at her handsome and now blushing mother.

"Yes; her cheeks were the colour of her dress, and that day she had a wreath of roses in her hair; for Emma's father loved flowers and made her ornament herself with them to please his eye. It was about sunset. It had been very sultry, and the roads were so dusty we could scarcely see after a horse or carriage passed by. Emma was in the front yard watering some plants when a gentleman on horseback rode slowly along, as if he tried to make as little dust as possible. He rode by the house at first, then turning back, he came right up to the gate, and, lifting up his hat, bowed down to the saddle. He was a tall, dark-complexioned young man, who sat nobly on his horse, just as if

he belonged to it. Emma, your mother that is, set down her watering-pot and made a sort of curtsey, a little frightened at a stranger coming so close to her before she knew anything about it. 'May I trouble you for a glass of water?' said he with another bow. 'I have travelled long, and am oppressed with thirst.' Emma curtseyed again, and blushed too, I dare say, and away she went for a glass of water, which she brought him with her own hands. Your grandfather had come to the door by this time, and he said he never saw a man so long drinking a glass of water in his life. As I told you before, it had been a terribly sultry day, and there were large thunder-pillars leaning down black in the west—a sure sign there was going to be a heavy shower. Your grandfather came out, and being a hospitable man he asked the stranger to stop and rest till the rain that was coming was over. He didn't wait to be asked twice, but jumped from his horse and walked in, making a bow at the door and waiting for your mother to walk in first. Well, sure enough, it did rain in a short time, and thunder and lighten and blow as if the house would come down; and the strange gentleman sat down close by Emma and tried to keep her from being frightened, for she looked as pale as death;

and when the lightning flashed bright she covered up her face with her hands. It kept on thundering and raining till bed-time, when your grandfather offered him a bed and told him he must stay till morning. Everybody was taken with him, for he talked like a book and looked as if he knew more than all the books in the world. He told his name and all about himself—that he was a young lawyer just commencing business in a town near by (the very town we are now living in); that he had been on a journey and was on his way home, which he had expected to reach that night. He seemed to hate so to go away the next morning that your grandfather asked him to come and see him again, and he took him at his word and came back the very next week. This time he didn't hide from anybody what he came for, for he courted your mother in good earnest, and never left her or gave her any peace till she had promised to be his wife, which I believe she was very willing to be from the first night she saw him."

"Nay, Aunt Patty," said Mrs. Worth, "I must correct you in some of your items; your imagination is a little too vivid."

Edmund went behind his mother's chair and putting his hands playfully over her ears, begged

Aunt Patty to go on and give her imagination full scope.

"And show us the wedding-dress and tell us all about it," said Bessy. "It is pleasanter to hear of mother's wedding than Parson Broomfield's funeral."

"But that's the way, darling—a funeral and a wedding, a birth and a death, all mixed up, the world over. We must take things as they come and be thankful for all. Do you see this white sprigged satin and this bit of white lace? The wedding-dress was made of the satin, and trimmed round the neck and sleeves with the lace, and the money it cost would have clothed a poor family for a long time. But your grandfather said he had but one daughter and she should be well fitted out if it cost him all he had in the world. And, moreover, he had a son-in-law whom he would not exchange for any other man in the universe. When Emma, your mother that is, was dressed in her bridal finery, with white blossoms in her hair, which hung in ringlets down her rosy cheeks, you might search the country round for a prettier and fairer bride, and your father looked like a prince. Parson Broomfield said they were the handsomest couple he ever married—and, bless his soul! they

were the last. He was taken sick a week after the wedding and never lifted his head afterwards. It is a blessed thing Emma was married when she was, for I wouldn't want to be married by any other minister in the world than Parson Broomfield."

"Where's your husband, Aunt Patty?" said Estelle suddenly.

Edmund and Bessy laughed outright. Emma only smiled—she feared Aunt Patty's feelings might be wounded.

"I never had any, child," replied she after taking a large pinch of snuff.

"What's the reason?" persevered Estelle.

"Hush, Estelle," said her mother; "little girls must not ask so many questions."

"I'll tell you the reason," cried Aunt Patty, "for I'm never ashamed to speak the truth. No one ever thought of marrying me, for I was a lame, helpless and homely girl, without a cent of money to make folks think me pretty whether I was or not. I never dreamed of having sweethearts, but was thankful for friends who were willing to bear with my infirmities and provide for my comfort. I don't care if they do call me an old maid. I'm satisfied with the place Providence

has assigned me, knowing it's a thousand times better than I deserve. The tree that stands alone by the wayside offers shelter and shade to the weary traveller. It was not created in vain, though no blossom nor fruit may hang upon its boughs. It gets its portion of the sunshine and dew, and the little birds come and nestle in its branches."

"That is such a beautiful image of Aunt Patty's," whispered Bessy; "I know whom she means by the tree and the little birds. But tell me, mother," continued she, passing her arm fondly round her neck and looking up smilingly in her face, "how can anybody love anybody as well as their own father and mother? How can they be willing to go away from home, where they have lived all their lives, to a strange place, with a stranger, too, whom they have never seen but a little while before? I'm sure I wouldn't go away from you and father and home if they piled up gold enough to reach the skies to tempt me."

Mrs. Worth passed her arm round the waist of her beautiful child and asked herself whether the time would ever arrive when she would feel willing to transfer such a treasure to the bosom of another. Her heart imperatively answered, No! and she wondered at the power which had drawn her

as if by enchantment from the home of her youth. She found it difficult to explain to the simplicity of childhood the influence of that master passion before which the ties of nature yield like flax in the flame; but taking advantage of Bessy's love of metaphor she brought the truth to her mind through the medium of her imagination.

"You were pleased with Aunt Patty's simile of the tree and little birds," said she. "Have you never noticed, Bessy, that when the birds are very young and the feathers thin and the wings weak they nestle close to the parent bird without thinking of flying into the blue air and seeking the world beyond? But by and by their wings grow strong and covered with beautiful shining feathers. They long to try their strength, and they fly away to build nests of their own. And if they meet some sweet warbler in the way they are very apt to go in company and sing and work together."

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Bessy; "I remember that beautiful ballad about the blackbird, who chose his mate and was killed by a gunner in the vale. Do you recollect that sweet verse, after the bridegroom saw the danger?—

'Alarmed, the lover cried, "My dear,
Haste, haste away, from danger fly!

Here, gunner, turn thy vengeance here;
Oh spare my love, oh let me die."
At him the huntsman took his aim—
The aim he took was, ah! too true.'"

Bessy's voice choked. The sorrows of the widowed bird opened the sluices of her sympathy and she could not go on.

"Well," said Edmund, kindly wishing to divert her attention and not disposed to laugh at her sensibility, "if we are all birds, let us see what kind of ones we are. Homer is the eagle, because he's ambitious and wants to be a great man. Yes, he shall be the 'bird of Jove, with thunder in his train.' You know that charming poem of Montgomery's where he compares Burns to all the birds of the air. Emma is 'in tenderness the dove;' and Bessy,

'Oh, more than all beside, is she
The nightingale in love.'

Little Estelle is the humming-bird,

'From flower to flower
Exhaling sweet perfume.'

Don't you think, mother, we make a charming aviary for you?"

"But you've left out yourself, brother," said

Emma, "the best of the whole—what will you be?"

"Oh! he shall be the bird of paradise," interrupted Bessy, "the most beautiful of all; and I think Homer ought to be the owl—he's so moping and fond of being alone. Then father can be the eagle. But what will mother be?"

"Never mind me, children," observed the mother; "but you must not give such an emblem to Homer; he would not like it were he to hear it, and even in jest you must always beware of wounding the feelings of each other. He stays alone in his own room that he may study without interruption, for you know he enters college in the autumn. He is ambitious, as Edmund says, and whoever becomes a great man must first be a studious youth."

Though the rain continued unabated, the evening passed off cheerily round a glowing fire. They forgot the dismal scenery abroad in the contemplation of their in-door comforts. It is not to be supposed that Aunt Patty had exhausted the storehouse of memory because we have interrupted the thread of her discourse. Scheherezade herself could not excel her in the number and variety of her domestic histories; and after supper was over, and the other children seated round the table at their

different occupations of reading and sewing, she sat in a corner with Estelle at her knees, entertaining her with her scrap erudition.

Ought anything to be regarded as insignificant or ridiculous that draws the mind from the narrow limits of self, opens the avenues of human sympathy and adds to the sum of human happiness? Is not Aunt Patty, the lonely, crippled and infirm, thus distilling the honey of life from its waste flowers and weeds, an object worthy of admiration and respect?

CHAPTER III.

FAMILY CORRESPONDENCE.

THE children were faithful to the duties their father enjoined upon them in his parting words, and the good angel of the mail was seldom allowed to depart without bearing tokens of love to the wayfaring man. They had frequent tidings of him as he pursued his journey safely and prosperously in spite of wind or weather. Whenever it was announced that a letter from father had arrived there was a full concert of joyous sounds and an eager rushing to the mother's side while she read the precious communication. Aunt Patty always put on her spectacles and took a pinch of snuff to hear it the better, and a beam of satisfaction even lighted up the misanthropic brow of Homer, for he venerated his father and remembered his farewell counsel. Mr. Worth had not yet reached the end of his journey, but he improved every pause to hold communion with the beings more endeared, if possible, by absence and increasing distance. His letters were sterling gold from the heart's

treasury. They were fraught with breathings of affection, emanations of soul, counsels of wisdom, admonitions of love, tender reminiscences of the past and kindling hopes of the future. They were sometimes addressed to his wife alone. In these the gallantry of the lover, a dash of the chivalrous spirit of olden times, mingled with the confiding tenderness of the husband, gave a charm to his letters that a woman only could appreciate. Sometimes they were addressed to his *Wife & Co.;* and it was pleasing to see how perfectly he could adapt himself to the peculiarities of every juvenile mind, from the sensitive pride of Homer to the infantile simplicity of Estelle. The answers to these letters were so characteristic of the young writers that we cannot but think they will prove interesting to the reader. We will give a few specimens, believing them the living transcripts of the youthful mind. Homer never suffered his brother or sisters to read his epistles, and of course he would not allow a stranger's eyes to scan the lines. We will begin with Edmund, whose thoughts, clear and bright as the sun, were open to the scrutiny of all. Edmund was the most unselfish of human beings. It will be observed how seldom he speaks of himself.

EDMUND'S LETTER TO HIS FATHER.

"DEAREST FATHER: Your letter, received last night, was a family feast. We all gathered round mother with hungry ears to hear it; and sweet as her voice always is, it never sounded sweeter than it did then. You describe every thing so minutely we feel as if we were with you, and I now know how true it is what you said about letter-writing. Everything that takes place, we think, 'That will interest father; we will be sure to put that in our next letter;' but when we have the pen in hand and see it on paper, it doesn't appear half as well. I have been reading a great deal and studying too. I want to tell you how much I have read in Greek and Latin when you return, and how far I have got in mathematics. But I ought not to speak of my studying by the side of Homer: he is at his books from morning till night, and, I have no doubt, will be a very great man one of these days. We go to Mr. Farnham's office every day to recite, though the mud is sometimes up to our knees. You have reached better regions than ours, or poor Faithful would be lost in the slough of despondency. Of all months in the year, I believe March is the most dismal: it

is neither spring nor winter, but the mud and the snow seem fighting all the time. Bessy saw a little patch of green grass yesterday peeping out on the edge of the pond (she calls it lake) on the south side of the house, and she called us all from the four points of the compass to come and worship the first herald of spring. Oh, father, I have a secret to tell you, but you must not breathe it to the winds, lest they should bear it back to Bessy's ear. I found a paper the other day, covered with certain strange characters, which, upon examining closely, I discovered to be verses of poetry, crossed and recrossed, but real genuine rhymes, in Bessy's handwriting. She actually cried when I showed them to her, and would not be pacified till I gave them up. They were upon your absence, and some of the lines were very pretty. I recollect two or three:

'Oh, father dear, why thus your stay prolong?
The days are darksome, and seem twice as long;
Whene'er I look upon the setting sun
I think of you, and wish your journey done;
And, though I loved you, dearly loved, before,
I do believe I love you more and more.'

Now, don't you think our azure-eyed Bessy will be a poetess by-and-by? Her eyes have the true

poetical upward turn, and she never sees a volume of poems without a bright glow of delight on her cheeks. Emma has not been as well as usual for a few days: she caught cold, and has a troublesome cough. I often fear that she is too good for this world—too gentle and too weak. I don't believe Emma ever told an untruth or committed an evil act in her whole life: she always seems thinking about heaven. I must not forget to tell you an anecdote of Estelle: the other day I found her weeping in a little corner by herself; it was a long time before she would tell me what was the matter with her; at last she said she was afraid she was going to die. 'Why, little Estelle, you look the picture of health!' 'Because, 'cause,' answered she, sobbing, 'I heard Aunt Patty tell somebody I was too smart to live long.' Really, dear father, she is the most amusing little creature you ever knew—she and Aunt Patty together; I mean, Aunt Patty is amusing too, in her odd way, and is she not the best and kindest of human beings, always excepting my beloved mother? I cannot bear to leave you, dear father, but I have promised Emma the other half of the sheet, as we write together, and I will not encroach on her limits, as she always follows the Golden Rule, without deviating one hair's-

breadth. I find I have done it already, for there is only one page left. I cannot help it now, so pray forgive me, and believe me your affectionate son,

"EDMUND."

"DEAR AND BELOVED FATHER: Edmund wrote the above two or three days ago, and I would have finished it immediately, but company came so very unexpectedly. The riding is so bad we never thought of seeing a human being, but just as we were all nicely seated round the evening fire, and all of us feeling so quiet and happy—that is, as happy as we can be without you—a carriage drove up into the yard, and we could not think who it was. It was Mr. and Mrs. Wharton, with Francis and Laura, all on their way home to Boston from a visit to a friend who lives far in the country, where they have been detained a long time. You remember they stopped here when they were going, and it was good sleighing, and they were all wrapped up in buffalo-skins, and their horses had more strings of bells than I ever saw before. They were obliged to leave their sleigh and return in a carriage, and they are going to rest here several days. We were very glad to see them, for they are so lively and agreeable, but I don't think I

ever would be tired of being with ourselves, alone. I love stillness, and I love home just for itself and because we can do just as we please, and when any one is visiting here, we must give up our usual pursuits, and do everything to entertain the company. I am afraid I am very selfish, and will try to correct myself. They have all indulged me so much, and been so kind and tender, there is great danger of my thinking more than I ought of my own gratification. They always give me the warmest seat in the room because I am apt to take cold; if we ride abroad, I must always wear the warmest cloak or shawl, and I must ride oftener than anybody else, because, they say, the exercise will strengthen me; and I can do so little in return for them. Edmund is the kindest brother that ever was in the world; I believe he would walk barefoot to the end of the universe if his mother or sisters asked him. Francis Wharton seems a good boy, but he is not like Edmund; he is more boisterous and rude. I cannot think what pleasure there is in making a noise: it only gives me a headache. Laura is a very fashionable little miss, and, I have no doubt, thinks me quite a dowdy. Bessy admires her very much, and she says Bessy is a great beauty. Oh, I hope you will come home very soon, for we

all long to see you so much. My heart aches to be near you once more, to feel your kind hand on my head and your good-night kiss on my cheek. Dearest father, if it is so hard to part from friends for a little time here, how can we ever leave them and think we shall never, never return?" Here a tear, which blotted the next word, indicated a sad foreboding in the heart of the young invalid.

Bessy had the privilege of writing with red ink, crossways, in her mother's letter, and it was a colour suited well to her glowing imagination.

"Dear father," said she, "it is a pity that I am younger than Edmund and Emma, for they tell you all the news before my turn comes. Fanny Wharton had told me so many beautiful things about the city, it makes me long to visit it. She goes to the theatre very often, and she says everything seems just like a fairy-tale, so brilliant and changing all the time. Father, if you get very rich while you are gone, you must take us all to the theatre and museum, and to see all the fine things in all the cities. I don't think I should care anything about balls and parties, but I do want to see those bright, strange things such as I dream about so often. Oh, I had such a wonderful dream I must relate it; you told me I might write a dream if I hadn't

anything else to say. I thought I saw a large clock, so large that it reached up to the skies, and it went down, all out of sight; the hands looked as big as iron bars, and when it struck, it sounded as loud as thunder. Every time it struck it said, '*Time, Time, Time,*' so deep and solemn it made me feel trembling all over. Wasn't that a strange dream for a little girl like me? Aunt Patty says it means that something great is going to happen to me. I know, when I went to bed that night, I laid awake, thinking how strange it was that we were in this world now and wouldn't be here by and by, and trying to think what the difference was between time and eternity. It seemed to me—and perhaps it was very wicked—that if I thought about it long enough, I could find out how it was that God never began to be. Every night these thoughts come upon me, and—I cannot help it—I lie and look up to the moon and stars, and things come into my mind that I never read or heard about, and it seems as if angels told them to me. Estelle just came to me and said, 'Tell father Aunt Patty don't give me too much to eat; I don't mean to be an animal.' A lady called here yesterday to see Mrs. Wharton, who offended Aunt Patty very much. 'Why, how

homely little Estelle grows!' said she; 'she is really getting quite coarse.' 'Ask the lady to look in the glass,' said Aunt Patty. Everybody laughed, and the lady didn't look pleased; she wasn't pleased with anything. 'Why, Emma is quite deformed,' said she; 'one shoulder is larger than the other.' 'I'd rather have a crooked back than a crooked mind,' retorted Aunt Patty. You know poor Emma is weak and cannot sit very straight, and I think it was cruel to say anything to hurt her feelings. I thought the lady had a very cross look, and as she was squint-eyed, perhaps she couldn't see right. Oh, pray forgive this big blot, for Frank Wharton pushed my arm on purpose, because I wouldn't get up and play with him. Please write me a letter all to myself that I can keep, and I will keep it so precious no one shall know its place. You don't know how much we all love you.

'Farewell! my tongue or pen can never tell
The flames of love that in my bosom dwell.'

"BESSY."

Bessy, like most juvenile poets, was prone to extravagance in her expressions of affection, but her father knew how to appreciate them, and, doubt-

less, these artless effusions were priceless in his estimation.

Shall we follow the wife to her lonely chamber, whither she has retired after the children have separated for the night, and steal a glance at the sheet on which she is pouring out her soul unto her husband? There, like the lovely Geraldine, "all in her night-robe loose she sits reclined," "o'er her dear bosom strays her hazel hair," while she traces on the silent page before her the thoughts she had been garnering up through the day. Foolish children! to think their mother would steal all the stirring incidents of the day and leave them nothing to relate. That page is the heart's scroll unrolled, a tablet of pure, elevated, kindling thoughts and warm, deep—yea, unfathomable—love—a love far more deep and intense than when, in Aunt Patty's legend, she stood in white satin and lace, the handsomest bride Parson Broomfield ever united in the holy bands of matrimony. Angels guard thee in thy retirement, thou faithful wife and tender mother! Thy lamp is the last that glimmers on the darkness of the neighbourhood, and many an eye that looks up from a sick and restless pillow on the mystery of night blesses thee and many a sad heart likens thee to that cheering ray.

CHAPTER IV.

MADAME LE GRANDE.

FRANK and Laura Wharton remained several weeks with their young country friends, in consequence of the almost impassable state of the roads. There were two members of the family who lamented their protracted stay—Homer, who always looked upon strangers with distrust and dislike, and Emma, whose feeble nerves shrunk from contact with those whose animal spirits effervesced so boisterously as Frank's, and whose refined simplicity was little pleased with the fine-lady airs of Laura. Edmund's joyous nature found something congenial in the gayety and warmth of Frank's character, and Bessy's ardent imagination was completely captivated by Laura's overwrought description of theatrical splendours and fashionable amusements. Mrs. Worth saw, with some maternal fear, this new influence exercised on her daughter's susceptible mind, but she trusted it would pass away like one of her own vivid dreams. Mrs. Wharton had been the friend of her youth, but,

though a very charming maiden, she did not prove a judicious mother, believing excessive indulgence a parent's crown of glory.

"I never had the heart to deny my children anything," she would often say to her friend. "You have more resolution than I have. I should fear to lose their affection if I refused to gratify their wishes."

"Do you not think *my* children love me?" asked Mrs. Worth.

"Yes; I never saw children so affectionate or obedient; a look from you has more effect than a thousand words from me. But your children are very different from mine. You must have perceived how very difficult mine are to manage."

Mrs. Worth smiled. She believed all children difficult to manage who were not accustomed to be controlled from infancy, and she felt very certain that if the superfluous energy of Frank and the luxuriant taste of Laura had been earlier restrained and directed, they would only have strengthened and adorned the characters they now threatened to deform.

At length a mild, bright, genial morning succeeded to a week of clouds and east winds. Glimpses of green were seen on the edges of

streams that now rolled in the gladness of vernal freedom, reflecting in their waters the intense blue of a cloudless sky. Here and there a large flock of swallows floated like a dark wave overhead, showing that the "time of singing-birds was coming," and that the winged wanderers were all about to return from a more southern clime. Bessy ran into the room in a perfect glow of rapture. "Look, mother!" exclaimed she, holding up a pale, small, delicate blue flower unprotected by a single green leaf; "I have found the first flower of spring. Here is a *Houstonia cerulea* that I plucked in yonder field. It looked like a star shining through the darkness."

"Really, Bessy!" said Frank, laughing loudly; "one would think you had found a string of diamonds or a purse of gold, instead of this little, old, pinched flower."

"She talks as if she had found an exotic," said Laura.

Bessy blushed, and thought it very likely that, in comparison with the exotics of the greenhouse, her little spring flower would dwindle into insignificance. She felt ashamed of her enthusiasm, and the glow faded from her cheek.

"Let us all take a walk and gather flowers,"

said Edmund; "Bessy's star shall guide us on our way."

This proposition was hailed with joy by the youthful party, and Bessy forgot her mortification in the excitement of the preparation. Emma, whose delicacy of health precluded her from such an enjoyment at this season of the year, shawled and bonneted the little Estelle, who kept jumping up and down the whole time, making the operation almost impracticable in the exuberance of her glee. She lingered on the threshold after the gay pedestrians had departed till their merry laugh died on her ear, then turned away with a sigh. The soft blue sky, the murmur of the rivulet, the song of the birds and the April flower, instead of exciting her spirits to buoyancy and mirth, filled her heart with a tender sadness which longed to gush forth in tears. The gay sports of childhood, the long walk in the open air, "the hop, skip and jump," in which young and elastic limbs delight, were not for her.

"I wish I were strong and healthy," said she, seating herself again near the fire and pressing her hand on her aching side; "one must be so happy when they can forget the body and let it do just as it pleases."

Homer, who was the only person then present, and who was leaning over a book, with his hands placed over both ears to exclude every noise, turned hastily round at the sound of her voice, for he did not like to be interrupted; there was a frown upon his brow and an impatient motion of the lip. But there was something in the drooping attitude of Emma and her pale, dejected countenance that appealed to his sympathy and painfully recalled his father's parting words. She was gazing in the fire, and large tears slowly chased each other down her cheeks. "Emma, what is the matter?" said he, taking a seat by her side; "what makes you look so sorrowful? Surely you don't care about walking with that boisterous Frank and his silly little sister?"

Emma was touched by the unusual kindness of Homer's manner, and her tears flowed faster. "I don't know what is the matter with me," said she, "only I am nervous and foolish, and, I am afraid, selfish too. For when I heard them so merry and laughing, I felt as if I must cry or my heart would break. Oh, brother, you don't know how hard it is, when one is so very young, to feel as weak and languid as I do sometimes, and to think, too, that I may never live to be much older."

"Don't talk so, Emma, don't! You know you have been better than ever this winter, and when the weather gets warm, and you can ride abroad more, and walk in the garden, and attend to the flowers, you will be in better spirits."

"But I am so useless," said Emma; "yet everybody is so kind to me. I sometimes feel very willing to die, and think it is a beautiful thing to die young, before one knows anything of the wickedness of the world. Then, again, to leave every one we love and lie down alone in the cold grave—oh, it's a dreadful thought!"

Emma involuntarily gave expression to feelings which had often chilled her veins at the midnight hour and saddened her noonday meditations. She so seldom spoke of her sufferings and fears that Homer was greatly shocked and affected by her desponding expressions. He felt drawn toward her by a tenderness such as he had never felt before, and resolved that he would henceforth endeavour to contribute to her happiness and comfort. He had always stood aloof from his brothers and sisters, refusing to share in their joys or their sorrows, till they ceased to look for his participation in either. Emma, sad and sickly, left behind because unable to unite in the active enjoyments of child-

hood, became, from this moment, a thousand times dearer to him than the blooming Bessy or rosy Estelle. He put his arm soothingly round her—a caressing motion so strange in the cold, repelling Homer that Emma lifted her eyes wonderingly to his face to prove his identity.

"You must not give way to such gloomy thoughts, Emma," said he; "that noisy Frank has given you a headache and made you nervous and weak. When I am a man, and father gets the fortune he has gone to secure, I mean to have a house of my own, and you shall come and live with me. Edmund will be a fine gentleman, and carry Bessy into the great world, and show her the theatres and museums that Laura tells so much about, but you and I despise such things, and we'll live together and have nothing to do with the rest of the world. We'll have a library as large as the Alexandrian library, and fine pictures and statues from Europe. I would like a wall built round the house, and a drawbridge that would lift up, so that no one could enter unless we chose to admit them."

"But don't you mean to marry when you get old enough, Homer?" asked Emma, her spirits reviving at the unusual kindness of the young misanthrope.

"No, never," answered he, with a look of scorn. "I would as soon live in Aunt Patty's scrap-bag. All women are foolish except my mother."

"But perhaps some of the little girls may grow wise enough for you, Homer, by the time you are ready," said Emma, now smiling through her tears. "Who knows but that Laura Wharton may be a wise woman yet? I heard her say she thought you a great deal handsomer than Edmund, and that she expected you would make a great man."

"You know she never said that of me," replied Homer, angrily, "except in ridicule. I had rather any one would stab me than laugh at me."

"No, indeed, brother; she said it to Frank when she did not know any one heard her. And he laughed, and said you had as much beauty as a thunder-cloud."

A gleam like lightning darted across the "thunder-cloud." It was a pleasant thing to be thought superior to Edmund, even by Frank's silly little sister. Homer, in this interview, had manifested two unwonted human emotions, sympathy for sorrow and susceptibility to praise.

In the mean time, the young pedestrians continued their morning walk rejoicing. Even the little city maiden, who was too genteel to wear

anything but kid shoes, which were soon sadly soiled by the mud, forgot her measured pace and bounded and ran with the rest. If they saw a green patch on the dark ground-work of the soil, there was a simultaneous shout and a rush toward the spot, striving to see who should reach it first. Edmund always reached the goal first, though Frank was the first to start, and was sure to push down some one in his way, whether accidentally or intentionally it is difficult to solve. Once he overturned Estelle and threw her flat on her face in the mud, bending the wire of her bonnet in such a grotesque manner it threw him into convulsions of laughter.

"Oh, Frank! how can you be so rude?" cried Bessy, wiping the dirt from Estelle's cheeks and nose; "see how you have spoiled her prètty bonnet."

Frank, who was as good-natured as he was thoughtless, checked his mirth at the sight of Estelle's tears, and insisted upon carrying her in his arms as an expiation for the offence. The only vengeance which Estelle threatened was to tell Aunt Patty, and when Frank put on a rueful look of penitence, she promised to remit even that.

"Let us walk to Madame le Grande's," said Ed-

mund; "Laura will be delighted with her, she is so fashionable, and a French lady besides."

"Oh yes!" exclaimed Laura; "I know from her name she must be charming. Has she any daughters?"

"Only one," answered Edmund—"a very accomplished young lady named Victorine."

"Oh what a beautiful name!" cried Laura; "I long to see her. But why di ln't you tell me sooner? I have on only an every-day frock, and I couldn't think of calling there now."

"Never mind," said Frank; "Madame le Grande and Mademoiselle Victorine both will excuse it. People who live in great style are never as particular in their dress as others."

"Must we parlez-vous Français to Mademoiselle Victorine, or does she understand English well?" asked Frank, laughing.

"She can speak both languages fluently," replied Edmund; "it makes no difference which you use."

Here Laura made a full pause by the wayside to arrange her dress and smooth her hair before presenting herself to the fashionable Madame le Grande. Bessy very good-naturedly assisted her in her toilet, though she seemed excessively amused

at her superfluous anxiety about her personal appearance. Sometimes she would shake back her own golden ringlets from her smiling eyes and glowing cheeks, and burst into a merry peal of laughter, in which Estelle joined, but Edmund looked grave and told them Mademoiselle Victorine never laughed loud.

"There is Madame le Grande's," exclaimed he as a low, faded white cottage appeared, situated far back from the roadside, with a dark railing in front, which ran along unbroken by a gate.

"That Madame le Grande's?" cried Laura, with a look of astonishment; "I thought you said she lived in great style."

"But you have not seen the inside. You know the French don't pay so much attention to the outside of the houses as the English."

The children were obliged to jump over the railing for want of a gate, and were soon at the door of the cottage.

"I never should dream of such a great lady as Madame le Grande's living in such a little, old place as this," said Laura.

"But it is beautiful in summer," cried Bessy; "only look, Laura, what a charming prospect there is even now!"

The children looked back upon a landscape on which some faint traces of vernal beauty were beginning to steal over the bleakness of departing winter. The river, graceful in its continuous undulations, rolled sparkling and shining through the meadows and fields, reflecting the blue of the sky, and, melting into that beauteous blue, was seen the soft outline of distant mountains, girdling the valley with an azure zone.

"Is it not lovely?" repeated Bessy, with growing enthusiasm. "But if you saw it in summer, when the trees are all covered with green leaves, and the fields are all green, and the flowers spring up here and there and everywhere, and the fruit hangs on the boughs, you would say you never saw anything so beautiful in all your life."

Here the door opened, and the tide of Bessy's eloquence was arrested by the ample person of Madame le Grande herself. Laura, who had prepared to make her handsomest dancing-school curtsey, stood rigid with astonishment at the extraordinary figure which met her gaze. Madame le Grande was dressed in the fashion of the last century, but the original colour of her robe it was impossible to determine, as it seemed to have been worn for years without passing through the custom-

ary ablutions. She wore a turban of dirty yellow, which looked coeval with her dress, and her dingy brown hair defied, in its tangles, the aid of brush or comb. Her complexion might have been fair, but it was brown with the accumulated soil and dust of time. Indeed, she was well worthy of the name by which she was universally known—the queen of slovens. Yet, beneath this disgusting exterior, she carried the native graces of a Frenchwoman, and invited her young guests to enter with smiles and bows that would have graced a city drawing-room. Frank took off his hat and bowed down to the ground, but Laura, casting an indignant glance at Edmund, made no acknowledgment of the lady's politeness. She pressed her frock close to her as she passed through the door, which she entered after the others, led on by an impulse of irrepressible curiosity. The parlour, or sitting-room, or boudoir, or whatever name it bore, was indeed furnished in a most original manner and occupied by original guests. A young girl about Bessy's age was seated by the fire embroidering a dingy green shawl with parti-coloured crewel. A young pig was crouched at her feet in a loving position, and on a large table on her left were reposing eight or nine young cats and kittens which looked

Bessy, Frank, Laura, and Edmund pay a visit to Madame Le Grande, where they see Victorine, surrounded by a French menagerie. "Yet beneath this disgusting exterior, Madame Le Grande carried the native graces of a Frenchwoman, and invited her young guests to enter."—*Page* 90.

as if they lived in the chimney, so begrimed with soot and smoke were their once white and silky coats. Some very familiar and domestic-looking hens were walking about the room, occasionally picking corn from the floor, evidently scattered there for their accommodation. A gentleman dressed in a suit of faded black sat on the other side of the fireplace, so intent upon a book in which he was reading that he did not at first notice the entrance of the juvenile visitors. But when he raised his head, he discovered a countenance so benign and intelligent, a forehead so high and commanding, an eye so bright and winning, that, in spite of his strange accompaniments, he won instantaneously the respect which is a gentleman's due. The young girl, who was Mademoiselle Victorine, laid her embroidery frame by the side of the cats and asked the young ladies to be seated. Her appearance was as singular as her mother's, but there was not the slightest personal resemblance. Her eyes were of deep, brilliant black, and her long hair, of the same hue, hung in matted tresses down her back. The ground-work of her frock had once been white, but it had lost all its original purity, and large bunches of flowers were dimly seen delineated on the dusky expanse. It was remarkable

to see the ease and grace with which this strange and grotesque-looking girl accosted her guests and acted the part of a hostess.

Edmund and Bessy, who were familiarized to the mysteries of this singular household, enjoyed the silent wonder of Frank and Laura, who looked as bewildered as if they were plunged in the midst of a menagerie. By the side of the table of cats was an old-fashioned harpsichord, and over it were several rows of bookshelves filled with classic works. That Monsieur le Grande was a scholar was evident from the authors which he had selected; that Mademoiselle Victorine was an accomplished child seemed as evident from the embroidery frame and harpsichord; and Madame le Grande had the manners of a lady of the first rank. And yet they lived among animals in the midst of congenial elements, regardless of the comforts and decencies of life, apparently as contented and happy as the inmates of a palace.

"We have a great many pets," said Madame le Grande, looking smilingly round on her dumb favourites, "but I could not spare one of the dear creatures."

"I would not give Fidele for all of them," cried Victorine, caressing a little shabby dog that just

emerged from a heap of rubbish and leaped barking into her lap.

"Let us go," whispered Laura to Bessy; "it makes me sick to see so much dirt."

When the children rose to depart, Madame le Grande loaded their handkerchiefs with apples and nuts, which they said they would carry home and divide with Emma.

When they left the house, Laura reproached Edmund and Bessy for deceiving her so, declaring that she would rather starve than eat anything that came out of such a den of wild beasts. Frank was in boisterous spirits, and pretended to be in raptures with Victorine, asserting that she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen.

"She would be beautiful," said Bessy, "if she were dressed nicely and kept her hair smooth and her face fair; she makes me think of the stories I have read about gypsies, with her shining black eyes and coal-black hair."

"But what makes them live in such a dirty old place, among the pigs and cats and dogs?" asked Laura. "I don't think Christian people ought to visit them."

"You must get Aunt Patty to tell you all she knows about them," replied Edmund. "She has

a scrap of Victorine's flowered frock, and if you can only draw that out of her bag, the family history will come with it. I have heard my father say that Monsieur le Grande was one of the most intelligent, well-informed gentlemen he ever met with, and that he would be an ornament to any society. They are very wealthy and extremely kind to the poor."

"One of these days," said Frank, "when I get to be a man, I mean to come back and see Mademoiselle Victorine; I will teach her how to wash her face and comb her hair, and make a fine lady of her."

The idea of Victorine's taking toilet lessons of Frank amused the children excessively, and as the springs of mirth, when once touched, are apt to vibrate long in the breast of childhood, they continued to laugh till they reached the threshold of home.

In the evening, when the children were discoursing the events of the day, Laura reminded Edmund of his promise to tell them something more about the strange, dirty family they had visited in the morning.

"Oh, Aunt Patty must tell you," replied Edmund; "she is the historian of the town. But

she must produce her scrap-bag first, for she keeps her memory tied up with her pieces."

This was a request which Aunt Patty never refused, and she was soon seated in the midst of a circle of smiling faces. Estelle sat on a little stool at her feet, holding her snuff-box in her left hand, with the right extended ready to plunge into the open reservoir. Emma sat quietly near; the tears of the morning exhaled in the sunshine of Homer's kindness had left a soft glow on her cheek delicate as the hue of the rose when the dew has just dried on its petals. Bessy leaned over her lap so close that the rich foliage of her waving hair shaded the fair tints of her sister's face, while it seemed to glorify her own. Nothing could be more charming than the young group that surrounded Aunt Patty, the sibyl of the evening. Laura, with her smooth brown locks braided down her back and tied at the ends with blue ribbon, formed a pleasing contrast to the two lovely sisters. And then Frank's round, laughing face peeping over Edmund's shoulder, as if ready to penetrate the mysteries of the bag, and Edmund's brow so fair and noble, and wearing that princely expression peculiar to himself. It was a family picture exhibited in the light a painter best loves. And how proud

Aunt Patty looked, to be the cynosure of those starry eyes, the living focus of those rays of youth and beauty! She undrew the string of her scrap-bag, smiled and nodded, patted Estelle on the head, then taking a large pinch of snuff, Edmund declared she sneezed out of the bag the identical sample of Victorine's frock which was destined to be the subject of their evening's entertainment. Sure enough, it lay on the top of the pieces, conspicuous for its enormous flowers and gaudy colours.

"Tell us all about Victorine, Aunt Patty," said Frank. "Did she spring up there among the cats and pigs, or has she lately come over from the great city of Paris?"

"You must let me begin in the right place," replied Aunt Patty, smoothing out the flowers on her knee, "or I never shall tell anything straight. The first time I ever saw Victorine, it was about two years ago, and she had on this very frock."

"And she's worn it ever since, I dare say," said Frank.

"Hush, Frank!" said Laura; "you always interrupt one so."

"Well," continued Aunt Patty, "very likely she has, for the poor thing don't know any better. Her mother brings her up among the animals, and,

as they don't change their coats, I suppose she thinks there is no occasion for her to change hers. One Sunday afternoon, just as the services closed, there came up a terrible storm of rain, and it thundered and lightened too. The carriage went home first with my niece Emma—Mrs. Worth that now is—and little Emma and Bessy. Edmund waited with me, for I was afraid to ride when it thundered, and we sat down in one of the pews till the carriage should return. Edmund got tired sitting still, and went up in the gallery and walked about there at his leisure. Who should he see there, all by herself, but a little girl in a flowered frock and green bonnet crying bitterly? He came down and told me what he had seen, and I sent him back to bring her to me, for it is hard work for me to hobble up stairs with my crutch. The poor thing came crying and hanging down her head, saying she didn't know how to get home, and she thought she was all alone in the big church. I asked her where she lived, and told her I would take her home when the carriage came, but that she needn't be afraid in the church, for it was no other than the house of God and the gate of heaven. It rained very hard when we left the church, and we had to go a roundabout way to carry the child home.

The horses got restive, going backward and forward in the storm, and when we stopped to set her down, they wouldn't stand still, but arched their necks and frisked about in a frightful manner. The little girl jumped out like a squirrel, and Edmund leaped after her and tried to get at the horses' heads. But quicker than lightning they sprang up in the air and overturned the carriage in a moment."

"Oh, Aunt Patty! didn't they kill you?" cried Estelle.

"Not quite, my darling. I knew nothing in the world till I found myself between a pair of sheets that Adam and Eve might have slept in, for aught I know; all the waters of the deluge wouldn't have made them clean. The wild, heathenish-looking child was standing on one side of me, and a big woman in a yellow turban on the other. I tried to move, but I was so bruised and hurt I couldn't lift my hand to my head, and there I had to stay three days and nights."

"In those dreadful sheets?" asked Bessy.

"No, child; the first night I was there a blood-vessel broke, in consequence of my fall, and every thing round me was stained with the blood that flowed from my mouth. Your mother, who came

to me as soon as she heard of the accident, sent for clean linen and napkins, saying she could not think of giving so much trouble to my kind hostess. And kind, indeed, she was, and so was little Victorine. They watched by me as if I were the dearest friend they had in the world, and I believe it is owing to the skilful nursing of Madame le Grande that I am yet in the land of the living."

"I do believe," interrupted Laura, "that I would rather die than have that ugly, dirty woman do anything for me."

"She is not half as dirty as the damp grave and the earth-worm," replied Aunt Patty, with solemnity. "I'll tell thee what, child, if you were lying in agony, thinking, perhaps, every hour might bring you into the presence of the holy One of Israel, and all your sins passing before your eyes dark and thick, you wouldn't be squeamish about the hands that smoothed your pillow and held your aching head. You would be thankful to be nursed by any one in the world, or your heart is harder than I think it is."

"I would like to know," said Frank, "what made Monsieur le Grande, who is really a fine-looking gentleman, marry such a witch of Endor as she is."

"I can tell you," said Aunt Patty, "for I heard him tell Mr. Worth all about it one night when I was there and they thought I was asleep. They had been talking about books, and everything one can think of, when Mr. Worth told him that he wondered to see a man of his talents and education willing to live so retired, and that he would assist him in choosing a situation more suited to his character. He said all he wanted was leisure and retirement and leave to do just as he pleased. 'Madame le Grande,' said he, 'has peculiar tastes, and so have I. We promised, when we married, not to interfere with each other, and not to let the world interrupt us. I was a poor young student and she a rich widow, who, taking a fancy to me, poor as I was, asked me to marry her, and you know I could not refuse.'"

"Oh how bold," exclaimed Bessy; "I shouldn't think a woman could be so bold."

"Nor I, either," replied Aunt Patty, with energy; "I wouldn't ask a man to have me if he was made of diamonds and cased in gold. It is a sin and a shame, and a disgrace to the whole sex. If the truth were told, it is the way half the women get married, I do believe."

"So do I," said Frank, "and one of these days

Victorine will ask me, and I will make a low bow, and say, Yes, I thank you, mademoiselle, with all my heart."

The children all laughed at Frank, and at the impression the little French gypsy had made on his imagination. The rest of Aunt Patty's history was too discursive, and interrupted too often, to be able to follow it in a connected manner. Indeed, her youthful auditors manifested some symptoms of uneasiness before its close, and Estelle, falling fast asleep, suffered Aunt Patty's snuff-box to drop on the carpet close by her kitten's nose, who ran round the room sneezing at every step.

In a few days, Mrs. Wharton and her children bade adieu to their friends and departed for their city home. Laura and Bessy exchanged warm professions of friendship and promises of a regular correspondence. Frank shocked Emma's refined sense of propriety by giving Bessy and herself a loud kiss on the cheek, where modest roses flushed crimson at the unwonted freedom.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Homer as the carriage rolled from the door.

And "Thank Heaven!" repeated the soft voice of Mrs. Worth, for at the same moment a letter arrived from her husband.

CHAPTER V.

A STRICKEN HOUSEHOLD.

IT was autumn, mild, rich, golden autumn. The corn, emerging from its golden husks, stood ripening in the mellow sunshine, the vermilion apples glowed through the changing leaves, and the grapes hung in luxuriant clusters through the slender lattice-work that supported the vines. And then the harvest moon! How full, how glorious was its light as its silver wheel seemed to poise itself on high, to lengthen the day for the anxious husbandman! The Worth family contemplated that moon with throbbing hearts, for they knew it illumined the return of the beloved traveller. He had not been successful in securing the fortune to which he had a just claim, and his last letter was written in a tone of unwonted sadness. Mrs. Worth felt some lawful and natural regrets at the downfall of their hopes, but they were soon merged in the thought of her husband's return. They had been so happy together before; why should they sigh for more abundant

wealth? The children were too young to feel the full weight of disappointment. They cared for nothing but seeing their father once more, doubly endeared by long absence. Day after day they gathered under the meeting elms, which began to shed here and there a golden leaf, to watch for the approach of the stately figure whose departure they had there lingered to behold. Mrs. Worth sat at the window that looked down the street, and every horseman whose dark outline was defined in the horizon made her heart throb quick and her colour to come and go with beatings from that throbbing heart. She wondered at his delay. The exact day had never been appointed, for he had endeavoured to guard against disappointment by speaking in indefinite terms. Still, affection fixed on the earliest possible day, and apprehensions always inseparable from such intense affection sometimes flitted darkly before her imagination.

"I know father will be here to-day," exclaimed Bessy, "for I had such a beautiful dream last night. I dreamed that he came back looking younger and handsomer than ever, and he had glorious wings on his shoulders, and he told us he was going to take us all to the loveliest country in the universe. Yet I felt sorry to hear him say so, for I knew I could

never love any place so dearly as this, my own beautiful home."

"I don't think that was a good dream," said Aunt Patty, shaking her head solemnly. "I never dreamed of seeing anybody look like an angel but once, and that was Parson Broomfield the night before he died. It is a bad sign. You shouldn't have looked after your father the morning he went away, children. I told you not to do it: that was another bad sign."

"Hush, Aunt Patty!" said Edmund, observing Bessy's eyes fill with tears and his mother turn very pale, notwithstanding she had no faith in dreams. "I will not allow of any bad signs about father's return. See, all nature is in smiles to welcome him back, and our hearts and faces ought all to be dressed in sunshine. Mark me, dear mother, for a true prophet. He will be here to-night before the harvest moon goes down."

Mrs. Worth smiled as she looked upon her son, the blooming personification of hope and joy. She looked at all her children, and thought they had all grown handsomer and taller during their father's absence. She remembered their filial devotion, and thought how it would gladden his heart to hear its recital. And Homer, too, gloomy and misanthropic

still, but ever affectionate to her, and ofttimes kind to Emma. She could present her dark-browed boy to his father and tell him that his parting words had not been uttered in vain—that though the evil spirit had not departed, like that which possessed the bosom of Saul, it could be charmed with the music of love. Her eye wandered into the garden, and rested on the fragrant grapes which were not allowed to be culled till father's hand had gathered the fairest and best; on the autumnal flowers whose blending purple, crimson and yellow emulated the rainbow dyes, and which were also reserved for the paternal eyes; then turned toward the heavens, so soft and cloudless in the day's declining glory, and she felt as if everything breathed of welcome, hope and joy. She closed her eyes in a kind of blissful reverie, and the sweet remembrances of youthful love came vividly back upon her soul. Softly she glided backward on the stream of time, and smiling images rose upon its banks, passed long ago, now brought nearer and nearer, brighter and still more bright. The scenes of her blooming girlhood, her sunny bridal hours, melted away into the mother's joys and cares, the wife's time-hallowed tenderness. A flood of gratitude and sensibility flowed over her heart. She was

lost to surrounding objects, and started as from the musings of a dream when Homer touched her on the shoulder, holding a letter in his hand.

"A letter!" exclaimed she, the chill of disappointment freezing her warm hopes. She took it hastily, without noticing the unusually gloomy brow of her first-born. It was a stranger's hand, but the postmark bore the name of her husband's southern residence. It was sealed with black. Had a coffin been suddenly placed in the centre of that family group, it could not have caused a more shuddering sensation than that strange, black-sealed letter. "My God!" said Mrs. Worth, dropping it from her nerveless fingers, and her head leaned heavily on Homer's shoulder. Edmund sprang to her side, but Homer, feeling a stern joy in being his mother's first supporter in the mysterious trial that might await her, frowned upon his brother and locked his arms closely round her.

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Bessy, wringing her hands, "what is the matter? How white she looks! How blue her lips! Emma, Emma, she is dying!" Estelle clung, weeping bitterly, to Aunt Patty, and Emma, pale and trembling, but self-possessed and thoughtful, ran into the house and brought hartshorn and cologne, and bathed her

mother's death-like face and cold hands. Edmund had taken the letter from the ground, and stood gazing at the black seal till it seemed as if a black pall covered the whole scene. It was the first object which met Mrs. Worth's opening eyes. "Death, death!" she groaned; "there is death in that letter: I cannot open it."

"Perhaps, dear mother," cried Edmund, with quivering lips, "it is an accident. This may have been written since father's departure, and the writer himself be in mourning."

"Open it," said she, faintly; "I cannot do it."

Edmund broke the seal, while the paper shook and rustled in his trembling fingers. He had scarcely read three lines when, with a loud, heart-rending cry, he tossed the letter wildly from him and buried his face in his mother's lap. That bitter cry was echoed again and again beneath the now desolate roof—the cry of orphanage and woe. Only one pale lip was silent, one breaking heart was still.

Speechless and tearless Mrs. Worth was borne to her room in the arms of her weeping children. Speechless and tearless she lay during the live-long night, with the bright harvest moon shining down into her chamber, as if in mockery of her

unutterable grief. Kind neighbours came there, for that wailing cry had been heard, and the whole village was soon covered with mourning. The common benefactor and friend was no more—the friend of the widow and the orphan—and they came to weep with the new-made widow and fatherless. He died of one of the burning fevers of a southern clime, and his ashes reposed in a foreign soil.

Wretched, desolate family! plunged at once from such a height of hope to such an abyss of sorrow. How long was that first night of agony! How intolerable its silvery brightness! Edmund and Emma knelt on each side of their mother's couch, with their faces buried in the counterpane, which became literally saturated with their tears. Once in a while they lifted their dimmed eyes to their mother's face, but it looked so white and ghastly in the still moonshine they shuddered and again veiled their brows. Bessy lay by her mother's side, her bright locks all dishevelled and drooping like the boughs of a weeping willow. So terrific was the shock to one of her ardent temperament that reason was for a while dethroned. She seemed to hold intercourse with invisible beings, and smiled, and made beckoning motions with her fingers, and sometimes laughed aloud—a horrible sound in that

chamber of mourning. Homer stood in the window with dry and bloodshot eyes, which were fixed gloomily, and even fiercely, on the clear night heaven, as if in defiance of the Power that had crushed all their spirits low. He remembered the hour when his soul had dissolved in a father's parting embrace, when his deep, solemn accents murmured in his ear and he had committed to his charge so dear, so holy a trust. And now that revered form was cold and lifeless, that deep-toned voice was still, their home was indeed that of the widow and fatherless, and he must now be "their pillar and their shield." Though Homer sincerely mourned his father, whom he honoured above all human beings, a feeling of independence, of premature manhood, of superiority over Edmund as the elder-born, the right of primogeniture investing him with something of paternal dignity, mingled strangely with his grief. "Oh that I were a man!" cried he to himself, clenching his hands tightly over his forehead. "I will be one—I never will own another guardian. I myself will be the guardian of the household. My father thought me worthy of the trust."

Aunt Patty, though the kindest of human beings, knew nothing of those delicate shades of

feeling which constitute the perfection of a refined character. She knew of no sympathy but what is expressed in words. She unconsciously planted daggers in the hearts of the children by asking the particulars of their father's death, unable herself to decipher a stranger's writing. She tried to console her niece, but finding her efforts vain, she sat down with Estelle in her arms, who had sobbed herself to sleep, and was soon nodding wearily over her.

Weeks passed by, and though wailing and lamentation had ceased, the sadness of the grave brooded over the household. The merry laugh, the bounding step, were heard no more; the grapes hung withering on the vines; the apples fell unheeded to the ground; the flowers faded away, ungathered and forgotten; the yellow leaves of autumn fell faster and faster on the green grass that carpeted the yard, but no hand swept them away. Mrs. Worth moved about once more in the midst of her domestic duties—

"But oh, with such a freezing eye,
With such a curdling cheek;
Love, love, of mortal agony,
Thou, only thou, canst speak."

She had not yet shed one tear. The fountains of

sorrow seemed frozen in her bosom. It was not till the traveller's trunks arrived, which he had packed with his own hands preparatory to his homeward journey, that the dry agony of grief found relief in tears. There were all the little memorials of love which the absent one had collected for those who waited his return—packets carefully folded and bearing the loved names on the envelope. There was the bag of calico pieces and Estelle's little kitten deposited in a corner of the trunk, and beneath the kitten a beautiful snuff-box. At sight of this proof of remembrance and kindness, even Aunt Patty wept aloud. Mrs. Worth turned from the gifts which had been selected with a refined regard to her peculiar tastes and character, to clasp to her bosom the garments he had worn, to cover them with her kisses and her tears. The sorrow so long imprisoned in her aching heart now found impassioned utterance. She gathered her children alternately in her arms and embraced them again and again, as if she feared they were to be torn from her by violence.

"Oh, my loved ones!" cried she, "ye are orphans —sad, desolate orphans. He who was my guide and my strength as well as yours is taken from us, to return no more for ever. Our once happy home

is as a grave to us—the world nothing but a wilderness. Oh that his grave were mine! He is gone, and with him life, joy and hope."

"We are left, mother," said Edmund, in half-reproachful accents—"we are left to love, cherish and protect you."

"Protect!" repeated Homer, looking darkly at Edmund; "to protect my mother is *my* right, and I will yield it to no one."

"God is left, dear mother," said Emma, softly, lifting upward her meek eyes; "he will never leave nor forsake thee. He will protect us all."

Homer turned aside and dashed a tear from his haughty eye. He felt the pious rebuke of his gentle sister, and the accusing spirit was aroused in his bosom.

"Father of mercies," exclaimed Mrs. Worth, bowing her head upon her hands in the humility of a chastened and broken spirit, "forgive my impious murmurs and give me strength to live for my children."

The widow's prayer was heard. Let it be supposed that several years have glided by, and see what changes they have marked in the family which we have introduced in the bloom of childhood and adolescence.

CHAPTER VI.

EDMUND'S DEPARTURE.

AFTER a lapse of three years, we will present another family picture to the eye of the reader, if it has not become weary of gazing at the last. Mrs. Worth is seated by the glowing fire-side of a New England winter, whose warmth reflects a colour on her now pallid cheek. The sable dress, the thoughtful brow, the mild yet serious eye, proclaim that widowhood of the heart which time cannot change. Standing by her side and leaning against the mantel-piece is a tall, commanding-looking youth with dark, gloomy brow and eyes of intense lustre. 'Tis Homer, by that gloomy brow and those peculiar, beaming eyes. With his father's lofty stature and unusual dignity of mien, he retains his own striking, misanthropic face—a face that exhibits only too faithfully the dark workings of his soul. His brother stands on the opposite side, less tall, less stately, but wearing even in a more remarkable degree that air of princely grace which distinguished his early boy-

hood. His hair and eyes are darkened, and were a painter to seek for a personification of that age when youth and manhood seem at strife, he could not rest upon a more engaging figure than that of Edmund Worth.

The brothers now meet at the maternal fireside. It is the college vacation, and consequently a holiday at the homestead. But where are the pale, spiritual-looking Emma and the fair, sunny-tressed Bessy? Has death again entered the domestic circle and destroyed the sweet blossoms of childhood as well as the strength and hopes of man? No; Emma, in pursuance of the advice of their physician, has accepted the invitation of a southern relative, and is passing the winter in a more genial clime, and Bessy is at length realizing some of the dreams of her ardent imagination in the gay home of Laura Wharton. It is the first time she has yielded to the pressing entreaties of her friends, who, instead of releasing her during her brothers' vacation, insist upon their meeting her under their own roof to enjoy the festivities of the Christmas holidays.

Aunt Patty still occupies her usual corner, and Estelle is faithful to her first love, though the outline of her chubby face is softened and has as-

sumed a more intellectual character. Aunt Patty is still her oracle, the recipient of all her childish joys and sorrows.

But who is that dark-haired girl seated at the table plying her needle with such grace and dexterity, yet ever and anon lifting up from her work eyes of such flashing brightness they almost startle the beholder? Do you remember Victorine, whose tangled locks and gypsy-looking face and dingy flowered robe were the admiration of the mocking Frank? Her mother, the queen of slovens, is no more, quietly reposing in congenial dust. Monsieur le Grande is returned to his native France, and Victorine, the orphan and the heiress, is under the guardianship of Mrs. Worth, whom she loves with a devotion that defies the power of language to express. Something of unusual interest seems to occupy the minds of all present. Victorine has dropped her work on her lap, and gazes on Edmund with an earnest, inquiring expression, while Homer's eyes are fixed on her, as if unconscious of the object on which they rest. Mrs. Worth looks down in deep, revolving thought, and Silence seems to have folded her wings by that glowing fireside.

"I will not go, mother," at length said Edmund, "if it pains you too much to give consent. Mr.

Selwyn would not ask too great a sacrifice of you."

"I do not wish to consult my own feelings at all," replied Mrs. Worth, "but your advantage. The offer is so generous, so unexpected, it involves so many dependencies, I hardly know what to say. I tremble at the idea of seeing a loved one depart to a distant land." The moistened eye and quivering lips spoke eloquently of the past.

"I will not go, dear mother, if it makes you unhappy," repeated Edmund, seating himself by her side. "I would forego every advantage and crush every ambitious hope rather than make you a prey to anxiety. Mr. Selwyn will be here to-night; decide for me to him."

"Will you resign the certainty of the first honours of the university?" asked Homer. "Who will wear your laurels if you relinquish them?"

"I will bequeath them to you, brother," replied Edmund, smiling, "if you are not already burdened with the weight of your own."

"I will win my own laurels, or never wear them," replied Homer, coldly. "I am content to be second to Edmund in everything, or rather I ought to be, since nature has willed it so."

"Neither nature nor justice nor affection has

willed it," cried Edmund, warmly. "You deserve a higher rank than myself, and nothing but modesty and self-distrust prevents you from being aware of it. I feel more proud of your reputation than I do of my own, Homer."

"I believe you, on my soul I do," cried Homer, with one of those sudden bursts of feeling which sometimes illuminated his dark countenance, "but I am not the less wretched on that account."

"Believe me once again, dear Homer," cried Edmund, earnestly grasping his hand, "when I tell you that it is unjust, ungrateful and unwise to let such feelings as you indulge destroy your own happiness and that of your friends. If I do accept Mr. Selwyn's offer, one of my strong motives is to remove from your path one whose fancied excellence makes you degrade yourself in your own estimation." The youth spoke with energy, and his father's spirit looked forth from his eyes. Every good and noble feeling in Homer's breast was touched. He felt the moral superiority of Edmund, and writhed under the consciousness of that jealousy which withered his heart's best affections. How mean, selfish and cold seemed his character in his own eyes! How base and criminal the master-passion whose vassal he had become! It was this

which had embittered his father's parting hour, clouded the bright prospects of his brother's youth and saddened the home of his widowed mother. The remembrance of man's first brotherhood was ever before him—severed by sin, crimsoned by blood, branded by a curse, pursued by suffering, exile and shame. A new feeling, scarcely acknowledged to himself and partaking of the intensity, the bitterness and the gloom of his character, was now taking possession of his opening manhood.

Mr. Selwyn was announced. Mrs. Worth turned pale at his entrance. The moment for decision was come, and her heart throbbed, incapable of calmness. He had been the warm friend of her husband, was a man high in public confidence, just returned from foreign lands, where he had been officiating in some elevated national station, and was on the eve of departure for Europe, where he expected to remain for three years. He was very rich, a widower without children, and the friends of Edmund believed that the partiality he now manifested for him would eventuate in making him his heir. They warmly urged him to accept his generous offer.

"Trust him with me, madam," said he, when he again renewed his proposal, "and you never shall

repent the confidence reposed; I will adopt him as my own son, and he shall have every advantage that wealth and opportunity can afford. Constantly engaged in public life, I have had but little leisure to feel the loneliness of a childless heart. Nor was it till I saw your son that I knew of what strong, unappeasable yearnings that heart is capable. Trust him with me, madam, and as far as possible I will make up to him what he has lost in his inestimable father."

Mrs. Worth wept as much from gratitude as memory. She looked at Edmund, and read his wishes in his kindling eyes. Could she be so selfish as to suffer her maternal tenderness to interfere with the brilliant prospects of her son? Ought she not rather to be proud of such a compliment to his talents, graces and virtues? The God who had deprived him of the best of fathers had raised him up a powerful friend in this great and good man. Then Homer, too, her strange, wayward first-born, perhaps the flame of fraternal jealousy would die away in his bosom unfed by the presence of its object. She thought of the Hebrew mother who committed her boy to the waves in the confidence of the God of Israel, and how this same feeble child became the lawgiver of

the Jewish nation and the chosen friend of the great I AM. Perhaps a glorious destiny awaited *her* son. She hesitated no longer. But that night, long after every eye was closed in sleep, she sat by her lonely hearth and dwelt on the sacrifice she was about to make. To live three years uncheered by the sunshine of his smile! How long in prospective seemed these weary years! and yet three long years were passed since, in the agony of a crushed and broken heart, she prayed for strength to live for her children. Prostrate on her knees, she renewed that prayer of faith. "O my Father," cried she, "thou hast permitted me to live for them, but let me not ask that they may live for me. Let me commit them into thy hands. Do with them whatsoever seemeth good in thy sight."

When she rose from her knees, she found herself directly opposite the portrait of her husband, and the features, softened by the pale lamplight, seemed to smile sadly down upon her. That picture, since his death, had been removed to the sacred retirement of her own chamber. There it met her first waking, her last closing glance. There its deep, still eyes ever followed hers, triumphing, in their pictured rays, over the mists and shadows of the tomb. It was a perfect likeness; the canvas

lived, breathed, spoke; Death was cheated of his prey.

Every thought was now merged in the absorbing one of Edmund's departure. Aunt Patty, whose ruling passion had lost none of its strength, expected samples of all the royal robes on the other side of the Atlantic. Yet, after having made the request, she recollected that it must be a bad sign, as she had given a bag to Mr. Worth and it came only as a sad memento of his death; she told Edmund he might bring them of his own accord, but she would not ask for them. Neither would she allow Estelle or Victorine to give him any parting gifts of affection, as they were henceforth *bad signs*, in her opinion. But Victorine plied her unwearied fingers to assist Mrs. Worth, and seemed to supply both Emma's and Bessy's place. Edmund was to pass through Boston and meet Bessy there, but Emma was too remote in her southern home to know of the change in her brother's destiny. She was gathering health and strength in the land of the "dew-dropping south," and her mother would not hasten her return.

"You would do anything in the world for Edmund," said Homer to Victorine as he sat watching her while she marked his initials on a

packet of linen. "You do not mean that he shall forget you."

"I hope not, indeed," replied she, quickly, "for I am sure I never shall forget him. What shall we do without him? He is the life and joy of the whole house. I believe I shall sit down and take snuff with Aunt Patty, and look over all the scraps she has gathered since the world began. I shall have no one to talk with when he is gone, for I cannot think of intruding my folly on your dear, sad mother."

"I suppose you will not condescend to talk with me," said Homer, drawing his chair back as he spoke. "I know I have nothing light or amusing to say, but I should think a sensible person might sometimes like grave things."

"Oh, I should like to talk to you, of all things," cried Victorine, laughing, "but you have such a terrific countenance, and look so grand and lofty, you frighten every idea out of my head. Now, Homer, don't be angry, but you are exactly like Lara, whose description Edmund read last evening. Don't you recollect it?

'He stood, a stranger in this breathing world,
An erring spirit from another world,
A thing of dark imaginings,' etc.

Such beings do splendidly in poetry, but they won't pass in every-day life."

Victorine had all the French vivacity of manner and grace of motion which was conspicuous in her in childhood, when slovenliness obscured her personal beauty. She was the only one in the household who dared to jest with Homer. Every one else stood in awe of the young misanthrope; even his mother, fearing to wound his too sensitive nature, never ventured to treat with levity his gloomy paroxysms. Victorine alone, like the harmless lightning playing over the thunder-cloud, gilding its dark edges with the flame of youthful wit and merriment.

"The Ethiopian cannot change his skin nor the leopard his spots," said Homer, a transient smile most beautifully illuminating his countenance; "neither can I smile like Edmund."

"Oh, if you knew how smiles became you," interrupted she, "you would not make them so rare. It is like noon breaking on midnight. There! don't frown again, for I didn't say that to please you, but for the sake of a metaphor. I don't care, Homer, whether you smile or frown: I'll laugh when you're angry and smile when you smile; but were you in real sorrow, I would

pity you and weep with you to your heart's content."

"I'll tell you, Victorine, why I so seldom smile," replied he: "it is because no one loves me. From my first remembrance of feeling I had a consciousness of something about me cold and repelling. I felt that I could not inspire sympathy or love, and I was too proud to seek as a favour what was denied me as a right."

"I thought you cared not to be loved," said Victorine, more seriously than she had hitherto spoken. "I thought you disdained the very idea of being loved, even by your own sisters."

"I!" repeated he, vehemently. "I would walk over burning ploughshares, endure the tortures of the rack and wheel, I would bear all the agonies that man can inflict or feel, for even the hope to be loved as Edmund is. *I care not to be loved!* The dread, the fear, the certainty of never having been, of never being loved, is the secret of my misanthropy and despair. I would willingly die to-morrow to be drawn, even this day, as near to the heart of one human being as Edmund is."

"Strange," said Victorine to herself as Homer, ashamed of the vehemence of his emotion, abruptly left the room—"strange that his heart should

seem to be filled with hatred when it is only yearning after love! I thought he was wrapped scornfully up in himself, and disdained all mankind. Well, I am sure we will all love him, if he will let us."

Victorine, domesticated as a child with the two brothers, looked upon them both with feelings similar to a sister, and addressed them with the freedom of one of an exceedingly ardent temperament; she suffered her affections to flow out bounteously on every object which excited their interest. She had once loved her cats and dogs to idolatry, but now her more refined taste and cultivated understanding revolted from the thought of bestowing upon them the caresses due only to human beings. She had loved her mother and mourned her loss, but Mrs. Worth seemed to her an angel of light, moving in a purer and holier atmosphere, and to diffuse on every object around her a spirit of purity and holiness. Much was said when this wild, neglected but singularly accomplished child was received into her family, and some even dared to attribute the kindness to mercenary motives, knowing the reputed wealth of the girl. "She can never get the tangles from her hair," said one. Victorine's hair was now remarkable for its glossy

waves. "Her skin will never become fair," said another. Victorine's complexion was now that of a pure, clear, delicate brunette. "She will never learn to dress like a lady," cried a third. Victorine was now proverbial for her maidenly neatness and taste in dress. People said Mrs. Worth had wrought a miracle, but it was only a miracle of love. Perhaps Victorine herself was destined to work one as astonishing and as unhoped for.

It was a sad hour for Edmund when he bade adieu to his mother, but as one parting has been described, this shall be omitted in the family sketch. Aunt Patty would not suffer an eye to follow him as he passed over the threshold, but when she recollected that it was Friday—bad Friday, that ill-omened day—her superstitious fears became so dark they infected the whole household. It was the day Mr. Selwyn had appointed; his business would not admit of delay, and he was not a man to whom one would avow such apprehensions.

The travellers stopped at Mrs. Wharton's that Edmund might bid farewell to his sister Bessy. It was their resting-place for the night, and we cannot resist the temptation of introducing another family picture. The years which had added dig-

nity and height to Homer and Edmund had not gone by without many a fair gift to the inmates of this household, not excluding their young guest, the blue-eyed Bessy. Frank was a tall, handsome, gay, rather dashing collegian, full of fun and frolic and reckless good-nature, and Laura a fair, fashionable-looking maiden, dressed rather beyond her years, but with exquisite taste, and perfectly *au fait* in all the courtesies and graces of society. But Bessy was the most beautiful, blooming, poetic-looking creature that ever adorned the prose realities of life, beautiful as the dreams of our own bright fancy, and surely nothing could go beyond it. Have you ever seen a picture with a kind of soft shadow floating over it?—a mist, as it were, reposing on its depth of light and shade? So it was with Bessy's face. It was brilliant from the clearness and transparency of its colouring, pensive from the softness and exquisite delicacy of lineament and expression. And her hair still curled and rippled and sported round her brow and about her neck in the unshorn, unfettered freedom of her infantile beauty. Bessy knew that she was beautiful, for flattering tongues, fond gazing eyes and faithful mirrors had too often repeated this truth. But the consciousness of beauty did not, as is fre-

quently the case, inspire gayety in her. She had an image of ideal beauty in her soul so much brighter and purer that she yearned after its realization with unutterable longings. She had witnessed the scenes which Laura described so glowingly, and they all seemed cold and artificial, devoid of intellectual life. The conversation which she heard sounded so vapid, false and senseless she could not be interested in it. She was afraid to express herself with that fervour and beauty of language peculiar to her, lest she should be thought extravagant and affected; so with a treasury of rich, burning, glorious thoughts within, she generally sat silent and abstracted, pensive and sometimes even sad. Her silence was imputed to youth and timidity. No one imagined what a peopled world of her own she was inhabiting. No one dreamed of the depth of feeling, the fire of imagination and the power of intellect embodied in that cherubic form.

"How beautiful is your sister Bessy!" exclaimed Mr. Selwyn. "I have not seen her since she was a little child. I wish it were possible to take her with us; she should have superior advantages. I have seen much of the world and the beauties of different climes, but never have beheld so lovely a

countenance. If she were my daughter, I would be proud to present her at all the courts of Europe."

The unconscious Bessy at this moment approached and put her arm lovingly in her brother's.

"What do you think Mr. Selwyn is saying of you?" said Edmund. "He wishes you could go to Europe with us. How would you like to travel on classic ground, to see the

> 'Isles of Greece, the isles of Greece,
> Where burning Sappho loved and sung'?"

The colour on Bessy's cheeks deepened to crimson.

"Oh, dear brother, can I indeed go with you? Is Mr. Selwyn serious? To Europe! To Italy, to the land of love and song! Ah! I see that you are sporting with my enthusiasm, by the smile on Mr. Selwyn's lips."

"If I had a female friend of sufficient age and standing to be your protectress, and whom I could ask to accompany us, you should go," replied Mr. Selwyn. "But Edmund shall take you across the Atlantic yet, if your classic enthusiasm does not grow cool as your heart expands."

"I thought the heart had an expansive power," answered Bessy, smiling.

"The enthusiasm of the head and the warmth of the heart are different, as you will one day experience, but not, I trust, before we return, for if the heart should twine itself round some new support, it would cling so tightly the wings of enthusiasm would flutter in vain to bear you away."

"There is no danger of my heart clinging more closely around any one than Edmund," replied Bessy, "and one of these days he is to build me a small Grecian temple, and adorn it with statuary and paintings, and shade it 'with bonny-spreading bushes,' and then we are to live together the happiest brother and sister in the world. Homer and Emma are to dwell in some baronial castle, lonely, grand and inaccessible, where the walls are mouldy with the damps of ages and the midnight shadows are peopled with apparitions."

"A few years hence," said Mr. Selwyn, "your castles in the air will be made of very different materials;" and as he looked upon these two charming beings thus linked together by the ties of affection, the strongest, the fondest they yet had known, he sighed to think what bitter lessons life might have in store for them when they learned

the strength of that love which is the over-mastering passion of the human heart.

"What are you talking about?—Grecian temples and baronial castles?" said Frank, who, with Laura, now joined the trio. "I have no idea of these exclusives, and whether you live in temple, castle, cottage or cabin, I shall be certain to squeeze in as priest, warder, gardener or wood-cutter."

"Oh, you would spoil all Bessy's poetry and sentiment," said Edmund, laughing. "You are too much of the earth, earthy; you could not live on nectar and ambrosia, and Bessy will have no grosser viands at her table."

"Now, Bessy and I are the very persons to live together," said Frank; "as I am earthy, I should bring her down from the skies occasionally to hold communion with me, and she, being of heaven, heavenly, would draw me after her; so the two forces, constantly acting, would produce at last the right equilibrium."

"I thought Victorine was your heroine," cried Laura, "you admired her so much in her beautiful flowered dress and fancy hair, as you call it. They say she is quite bewitching now."

"I will leave Victorine for Homer. He is grand, gloomy and peculiar, and she bright,

sparkling and gay. There should always be a contrast, to produce that delightful equilibrium I was speaking of just now."

"Who will contrast with me, brother?" asked Laura. "You have entirely slighted me."

"There is no one left for you but Edmund, and he is entirely too perfect to contrast with any one, unless it is the witch of Endor herself. I don't know you yet, Laura, but I believe you have more character than we dream of; you are trying hard to be a fine lady, but you are meant for something better or worse, after all. Upon the whole, you and Edmund would do admirably together; as for Homer, he is the hero of the drama, the Corsair, the Paul Clifford, the Charles de Moor, for whom half a dozen maidens may yet die."

"And what will you do for poor Emma?" said Bessy, amused at Frank's arrangements for the future. "There is no one good enough for Emma."

"Emma!" repeated Frank. "Oh! I forgot Emma. Though she is so young, she is so thoughtful and pious she always seemed to me like old folks. I'll give her to Mr. Selwyn, for I remember her saying one day he was the handsomest man she ever saw, except her father."

Mr. Selwyn blushed at the compliment, but looked kindly on the bold, gay youth who dared to utter it. He said he intended to have a patriarchal establishment, and when they were all married, they should come and live with him, and he hoped to see their children's children even unto the third and fourth generation. He pondered Frank's sayings in his heart. "Let us see a few years hence," thought he, "whether he has spoken in the spirit of prophecy. These girls and boys will then be men and women, and these words of jest may be remembered as the shadowing forth of their future destiny."

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN.

SHALL we look over Bessy's shoulder while she reads a letter from Emma, dated about the time when Edmund, unknown to her, began his transatlantic tour? We should like to see her impressions of a southern life as contrasted with her northern home.

"DEAR BESSY: I can scarcely realize that I am addressing you in the very depth of winter, for gales soft as summer are fanning my cheek. To be sure, there is a bright fire glowing in the chimney, but the doors and windows are all open, and Mrs. Woodville, or Aunt Woodville, is sewing in the piazza. I can imagine you all gathered round the blazing hearth, shivering if the door is accidentally left ajar, with your listed windows and doors, your banks of tan round the walls of the house, your deep white paths through the drifted snow, and all the chill and paraphernalia of winter. We have the music of sweet singing-birds, you the jingling of the merry-going bells. There are beautiful

roses blooming in the garden, such as we cherish at home as rare exotics, protecting them from every breath of winter. Oh, Bessy, you need not wonder that I feel like a new being when such frail, delicate things as flowers bloom fearless and unharmed by frost or cold. My breath no longer labours in my bosom: it comes and goes without my knowing it; and my heart no longer throbs wearily against my aching side. Aunt Woodville is very kind to me; she sends me out every morning to ride before breakfast on a little pony, accompanied by Uncle Jack as my gallant. You must know I have as many uncles and aunts as there are negroes on the plantation, and I have already become so much attached to them I am very willing to give them that endearing title. They will do anything in the world for Miss Emma, 'Bless her little heart!' they say. You know the prejudices I had against negroes before I came, but I find them so kind and pleasant I fear I shall like them better than our own white servants. Aunt Charity is just coming up the steps with a bucket of cold water balanced on her head, her right hand touching the edge of the pail, her left resting on her hip. You cannot think what a picturesque and graceful attitude this is, and could you see half a dozen of them walk-

ing from the spring, bearing in this manner their brimming buckets, you would be convinced that labour did not necessarily bow the figure and deprive it of all grace of motion. I used to think rich southern planters had nothing to do, with so many slaves to wait upon them, but I am sure my dear mother would think it a weary task if she had to carry about a big bunch of keys like Aunt Woodville, and keep so many people at work about her. Her house is as neat as wax, and I could not use a better comparison, for her summer parlour and bedroom have waxed floors, which shine so that you may see your face in them, and they are so smooth that there is great danger of your sliding down. In the large hall there is a little shelf where a bucket of cool water always stands—an object of perfect admiration to me. The wood is as white as snow, and it is hooped with burnished brass, and there is a dipper in it made of the cocoanut shell, rimmed with silver. This is a trifling thing to mention, but it seems to me more characteristic of the south than anything else. I will relate one anecdote for Estelle's amusement. We have a little black girl here of the name of Sukey who waits particularly on me. The other day I asked her how long it would be before

supper was ready, as I wanted to take a walk. 'Oh,' said she, 'it will be a good little heap of a piece of a while.' But this is not my anecdote: one evening soon after my arrival, as I was sadly wandering about in the yard, I heard Aunt Charity calling in the most mournful accents on the name of Sukey; again and again she repeated the sound. 'Is Sukey lost?' said I, beginning to be anxious for my little waiting-maid. 'No, I hope not,' said she; 'I always calls 'um home at night.' 'Does she go away so far every night?' said I. 'I should think she was too small; I wonder Aunt Woodville lets her.' Here Aunt Charity showed her white teeth from ear to ear: 'Oh, Miss Emma, you are so funny! Some of 'um little, some of 'um big; misses don't worry herself about 'um.' I did not quite understand Aunt Charity, but hearing her continue to invoke Sukey so mournfully, I offered to go with her in search of the lost child. Aunt Charity stared at me a moment, then held tight by the fence and laughed and shook as only a negro can laugh and shake. 'It's the cows, Miss Emma, the cows; we all calls 'um Sukey.' Uncle Woodville was so much amused at my mistake that he has called me Sukey ever since.

'Dearest Bessy, the sweet briar enclosed in

this letter was plucked from my father's grave. I have enclosed a sprig to my mother, as the most sacred, the most precious, of all earthly mementoes. Every evening, when it does not rain, I walk to this hallowed spot, and I feel as if your spirits were all hovering near me to hold communion with the sainted dead. When I first saw that grave, I thought my heart would break. I threw myself on the cold clay and clung to it as if it were the sacred body of our father given back to my arms. I called upon his name, but the sighing of the long grass alone sounded in my ears; the chill of the damp earth penetrated to my very soul, and I remembered the warm breast where I had once pillowed my head, and the contrast was agony. When I arose and looked up, the setting sun shed such a mild light on the shadows of that mournful place I felt that the world was not all darkness; I recollected that beautiful passage of Scripture: 'And the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in his beams.' I no longer thought of my father as mouldering beneath the clods of the valley, but as an angel in heaven, more glorious than the sun, yet ever becoming more and more glorious. Many a time, dear Bessy, when I went to kneel by that grave of our father, I thought I should soon sleep

coldly and quietly by his dear side, and all unconscious as he there lies, it seemed to me that it would be a comfort to him to have his 'young moralist' reposing so near him. Oh how many dark and sweet thoughts were blended in my mind! I wanted, if I died, to be buried in the same coffin, to be wrapped in the same winding-sheet, and then, when the last trumpet should sound, the arms of my father would enfold me and bear me tenderly to the mercy-seat of my Saviour and my God. Do not let mother see this part of my letter, for I fear it would make her sad. I would only bring to her the sweetest and holiest memories; I would tell her how lovely the pale rose of winter blooms on the soil that covers his ashes, how, like a celestial ministrant, the moon comes down and covers it with a silver pall, and makes the place of graves beautiful as the gate of heaven. I would tell her how every one here worships his memory, how the tongue of the African, as well as of the white man, grows eloquent in his praise. How I wish they could see Edmund, or you, Bessy! I am such a poor, frail creature the only feeling I can excite is compassion, yet I am daily stronger and better; they tell me I am getting rosy. You know with what reluctance I left home, and what a poor return

I made for Uncle Woodville's kindness, who came so much out of his way to induce me to accompany him back from the north. He had heard our dear father speak so tenderly of his invalid daughter, and of his wish that she should breathe the soft gales of the south; the good man sought me out and would not be denied. Surely a kind Providence directed his steps, for the sickly plant has indeed revived, and rejoices in the sunshine and the dew. I am writing you a long letter, but so many things crowd for expression I cannot lay down my pen. I had a long letter from Homer last week. I cannot tell you how it affected me: it was very kind, but very melancholy; he says we must live together, for I understand him better than any one else, and am not so selfishly happy as the rest of the world. Poor Homer! if he only knew how well we all loved him, he would not make us so sad as he does. Tell Aunt Patty that Aunt Woodville has collected a great many pieces of calico for her scrap-bag, and has told me so many pleasant incidents connected with them I fear I cannot remember them all; tell her everybody here knows Aunt Patty, and loves her too, for a certain somebody has talked a great deal about her, and I have no doubt she has felt her left ear burn very often—

a sign, you know, that some one is praising her very hard. Dear little Estelle! tell her she must water my geraniums and move them where the sun shines warmest in the day and the fire has diffused its heat at night. Oh, the sweet flowers of the south! yet I would give them all, even in their spring glory, for a glimpse of the snows that surround my northern home. One little circumstance, my beloved sister, I must not omit, though, if it affects you as it did me, this paper will be blotted with your tears. I was rambling in the woods that skirt the cultivated grounds, and stopped under a large beech that hung over a narrow stream, or branch, as it is here called. There was a gray trunk fallen just at the foot of this noble tree; I sat down and listened to the gurgling waters, when I caught a glimpse of letters engraved on the bark of the beech tree. First on the silver rind was the name of our beloved mother, then her children, from the first-born Homer to the little Estelle. Ah! whose hand had carved these characters? who had sat like me on that gray fallen trunk and thought of the dear ones left behind? Where is the traveller now? Where I perchance may soon be, and one of those loved ones, it may be my own Bessy, may wander to this spot, and sit under this

spreading beech and weep for me as I have wept for him. I have touched a sad chord, but I did not intend it. This is such a place for memory it is difficult to be cheerful and thoughtful at the same time, yet you must not think of me as otherwise than happy. If I were not so, I should be the most ungrateful being in the world. Forgive my egotism; I have written so much of myself I am ashamed to look back. But of whom do you wish to hear in this land of strangers more than your own affectionate

"EMMA?"

We love family letters, and would gladly transcribe the correspondence of the brothers and sisters during their separation from each other. But we fear others may not have congenial tastes, and would find them too unvarying and quiet to satisfy that love of excitement which is fed by stirring incidents and unfolding passions. Edmund wrote volumes in his long epistles, but the ground he travelled was classic, and every particle of dust on which he trod has been made sacred by the children of genius and of song. His pages would present nothing new to the reader, though they were read with rapture and enthusiasm by those to whom they were addressed. Bessy was his par-

ticular correspondent, and she now poured forth her soul in harmonious numbers, for she had discovered she had the gift of song. Her spirit, like the Æolian harp, responded in music to every breath that swept over it, and thrilled with transport at its wild melody.

"Charming child!" Mr. Selwyn would exclaim when he perused these beautiful effusions of youthful genius; "she shall yet visit classic ground. She will be a Corinna without her imperfections."

The time of Edmund's absence was shortened by one year in consequence of some new arrangements of Mr. Selwyn, and it is astonishing how quickly two years glided by, bringing back the young traveller to his native soil. It was rather more than two years, however, for when he left home it was in the depth of winter, and now it was in the full bloom of summer. As they approached the house in the hush of a moonlight evening, Edmund's feelings became so intense he would not bear that even Mr. Selwyn should witness the meeting. He was no longer a boy, yet he knew that he should give way to boyish emotion, and leaping from the carriage, he jumped over the garden railing and opened a side gate, which brought him unobserved to the end of the piazza, where two couples sat in

the moonlight at some distance from each other. Edmund stood still a moment, and contemplated these figures with a throbbing heart. The two nearest him were immediately recognized; the dark brow of Homer was bent toward the upturned face of Victorine, whose brilliant eyes could never be mistaken for another's. She leaned back against a pillar, and the vine that encircled it drooped its dewy leaves on her sable hair. There was something exquisitely graceful in the abandonment of her attitude and the contour of her head defined on the green curtain-work behind. He was talking in a deep undertone and she was listening, but her eyes wandered over the firmament as if troubled by the burning gaze of his.

"He loves her," thought Edmund; "two years have not passed away in vain for him. God bless thee, my brother, and not only fill thy heart with love for her, but for me and all mankind!"

His eyes turned to the other pair, who sat side by side at the other end of the piazza, equally absorbed by each other. That young female form could belong to no other than his sister Bessy. Such angel hair never adorned any other head but hers. And who was the young man that sat so near her that the night gale, as it fanned them,

blew her ringlets against his cheek, that evidently inclined to meet their soft caress?

Edmund felt a sudden pang at sight of this stranger admitted to such near communion with his beautiful sister. He had been exiled from his maternal home, a wanderer to various climes, but he had brought back unchanged affections, a heart in which fraternal love was still the ruling principle. He returned to find himself supplanted as it were in the bosom of others. Homer and Victorine, Bessy and the stranger, thus sat in the silence of that moonlight eve as if the world contained no beings but themselves, and as if the moon revealed the secret of her glory alone for them.

"Where are my mother and Emma," thought Edmund, catching the glimpse of a lamp through the white curtains of his mother's window, "dear old Aunt Patty and darling Estelle?" He turned softly, and passing through a grove of lilac trees, entered a side door, which was left open, and stood at the entrance of his mother's room. She sat at a table reading. Letters were scattered around her which seemed to be his own, which she had been reperusing. Time, as if charmed with her sweet, matronly graces, had touched her so gently that

he had not left the slightest impress of his defacing fingers. It was very thoughtless, very imprudent, but Edmund could not resist the temptation of stealing noiselessly behind her chair and clasping her in his arms before she was aware of his presence. The cry of joyful amazement that resounded through the house brought all its inmates but poor Aunt Patty gathered together in Mrs. Worth's apartment. Even the stranger hurried to the door, but drew respectfully back, as if conscious the scene should be sacred from intrusion. Emma and Estelle came flying down stairs in their loose white robes, which Edmund afterward declared were the most becoming dresses they had ever worn.

"Oh, Edmund, how tall you are grown!" "How sunburned you are!" "How well you look!" "When did you come?" "And how did you get in?" Such ejaculations were showered into his ears, while his hands were grasped by half a dozen pair of loving hands, and as many pair of arms tried to encircle his neck.

"Who would not cross the Atlantic for such a welcome home?" cried he, in the midst of that soft prison of snowy arms. "Emma, the south winds have blown kindly on you; they have given colour

and health to your cheek. And Bessy—" He remembered the stranger in the piazza, and looked earnestly upon her. She blushed, and leaned her face on his shoulder. "Do you love no one better than Edmund yet?"

"Oh, no one in the world," replied she, hastily; "ungrateful brother, to ask such a question, when my heart is aching from the very fulness of its joy and love!"

"Don't you want to see Aunt Patty, Edmund? —poor Aunt Patty?" asked Estelle, sadly.

"Aunt Patty!" repeated Edmund, starting. "She is not dead?"

"No," cried Estelle, "but she can't walk any more, and has to stay in her own room all the time and sit in a big arm-chair. Come and see her, Edmund; she told me to bring you up."

Estelle led her brother up the winding stairs to the chamber of Aunt Patty, while Emma and Bessy followed close behind. There sat Aunt Patty in the big arm-chair, a little table close beside her, on which lay her snuff-box and spectacles and a pile of books. Her head was drawn on one side, and her whole appearance spoke increased infirmity. Edmund was so much grieved at this unexpected change that he held her hand in silence, while she

shook his as if she would never release her grasp, smiling and ejaculating, "How handsome you have grown! How like a man you look! As good as ever, I know! Did you bring some pretty pieces for poor old Aunt Patty? Estelle is making them into a fine bed-quilt for me, so there will be no danger of their getting lost. I can't walk about any more, but I've so many feet to run for me I hardly miss my own."

Edmund assured her that he had brought beautiful specimens of English and French silk and calico, and that he could tell her a great many anecdotes of ladies who wore similar dresses. In the morning he would unpack his trunk and display his collection of European curiosities. Estelle longed not more impatiently for the morning's dawn than Aunt Patty, whose strange ruling passion seemed to gather strength as her physical powers declined.

Mr. Selwyn's arrival was hailed with a joy which, though less vehement, was as heartfelt as that which greeted the return of Edmund. They greeted him as a benefactor, friend, almost as a father. Though he was certainly not a vain man, he could not help looking kindly at Emma, remembering Frank's parting jests. Emma, whose affection for her father bordered on adoration, felt as if she could almost

worship the man who was his early friend and associate. His character, too, was such as her serious and reflecting mind knew how to appreciate. Its philanthropy, its magnanimity, disinterestedness, justice, loftiness and piety constituted her idea of a Christian gentleman. Bessy compared him to the oak under whose shade the wayfaring man and the child find refreshment and rest, but Emma thought the beautiful similitude of Scripture, "The shadow of a great rock in a weary land," more striking. She loved the book of God, and as naturally sought its divine metaphors as the panting hart the cooling stream.

The stranger of the piazza was introduced by the name of Vivian. In spite of his efforts to prevent it, Edmund could not help bowing coldly to one who seemed to have come so near the heart of Bessy. Who was he? Whence came he? By what right was he domesticated in the family circle? Estelle, who dearly loved to tell news and create surprises, answered all these questions without his asking one. "I have got something to show you," whispered she, mysteriously. "Come with me without letting Bessy see you, for that would spoil it all. Gliding before him with a lamp carefully shaded by her hand, she conducted him to a little

back parlour which his father had occupied as a study. The books still remained as he had last arranged them, but everything else was changed. The windows were darkened by green curtains, drawn closely, except one, through which the moon looked, as a celestial amateur, on one of the purest productions of human art. In the centre of the room stood an easel, sustaining a canvas on which glowed the lineaments of an angel, a muse or a grace, just as the imagination of the gazer pleased to decide. The soft blue eyes were turned upward with a kind of wistful, languishing expression, as if they yearned after the heavenly and unseen, finding nothing amidst the earthly and the seen to satisfy the cravings of the heart. The hair fell back, like a golden halo, around the calm, beauteous brow, melting away in the shadows of the background; the hands were clasped, as in the attitude of prayer, and gently raised above a circle of transparent, rose-tinted clouds that rolled over the foreground, threatening to veil the fair head with their gauze-like folds. Edmund stood gazing so long at this picture that Estelle's hand ached from holding the lamp, and she quietly deposited it on the floor. Though Edmund had not spoken one word, she knew that intense admiration closed

his lips, and there was something too sublime to her in his silence for her to dare to break it. As the lamplight receded, the moon's rays fell gloriously upon it, and the shadow of the lattice was reflected on the face. "How beautiful!" at length exclaimed Edmund. "How lovely! What a perfect likeness, yet what an angel countenance! Who is the artist? He should be immortal!"

"It's Mr. Vivian," said Estelle—"the gentleman you saw here just now. He was travelling, and saw Bessy at church, and wanted to make her picture to carry off to Italy. He's painted one for himself, and this is for mother. He's waiting to paint you too, for he heard mother say she would give all the world for your likeness when you were gone. And we all want him to paint mother, and I want him to take Aunt Patty."

Estelle paused to take breath, and to watch the effect of her wonderful communications. Edmund still kept his fascinated gaze on the illuminated canvas, thrilling under the magic spell of genius.

"Who and what is this young man?" cried he again.

"It's Mr. Vivian, I told you, brother," repeated Estelle, a little impatiently; "he's going to paint me in Aunt Patty's lap, holding her snuff-box,

and she's to be sorting out pieces of calico. That big canvas there is for us."

"And what does he ask for all his pictures?" inquired Edmund.

"I don't know," replied the little girl, thoughtfully, "but I heard him tell Bessy once that she would pay him for all. That is not fair, is it, brother?"

"And what did Bessy say?"

"I didn't hear what she said, but she turned away her head as if she didn't like it; I know I wouldn't."

Edmund felt a soft arm twining round his, and looking down, he saw the sweet original of the picture at his side.

"Is it like me, brother?"

"Yes; but it makes my heart ache to look at that picture."

"You don't like it, then?"

"I could gaze on it for ever; but, Estelle, my darling, take back the lamp to the parlour, and we will follow you directly. The moon gives light enough for us."

Estelle took up the lamp and walked slowly out of the room, feeling somewhat slighted after the pains she had taken to exhibit the portrait. Ed-

mund drew his sister to the window, and once again repeated the earnest question, "Who is this young man?"

"He is an artist!"

"I know it, and a glorious one! What else?"

"He is a poet. He writes divinely, as he paints."

"And what else, my sister? Forgive this inquisition."

"He is a devoted son and affectionate brother," answered Bessy, in a firmer tone. "He supports a widowed mother and orphan sister by the works of his genius."

"If so, I honour him. And yet he is willing to linger here for weeks, asking no other recompense than my sister's heart."

"Edmund!"

There were tears in Bessy's voice, as some beautiful writer has expressed it, and Edmund's heart smote him with a sense of unkindness.

"I have been gone a long time, Bessy, and during my absence I have yearned after my sisters with undivided tenderness. I return and find a stranger occupying the place I left and supplanting me in the bosom of one, perhaps the best beloved. I may be a little jealous and selfish, but I am

jealous for you also, and would not willingly yield my place to one who is not supremely worthy."

"Your place, Edmund, will never be yielded to another. But the heart must be very narrow indeed that has not room for any but brothers and sisters. It seems to me the more one loves, the more one is capable of loving. I know but little by experience, but I believe the ocean's waters can hardly be compared in breadth and depth to the love of the human heart."

"One question more, dear Bessy—"

"No, no, Edmund; no more questions to-night. But one thing, I pray you: do not think less of Vivian because he happened to imagine Bessy's foolish face would look well on canvas, and wished to retain it as a specimen of his art, or that he is willing to gratify a fond mother's feelings by leaving her an image which may remind her of me when I have passed away, like a dream, as though I had never been. Come, they will be angry at my keeping you here so long."

The brother and sister went out hand in hand, and Edmund felt, dearly as he had loved Bessy before, the interest he now felt for her was far deeper than ever. Vivian, the artist, the poet, the lover, became henceforth an attractive study, and the

more he studied, the less he wondered at the influence he had acquired over the ardent and imaginative Bessy. When they returned to the family circle, Mr. Selwyn came forward with Vivian, and again introduced him to Edmund as a young friend of his whom he recognized as having met in Italy, and of whose reputation, as an American, he was very proud. The tone of confidence and approbation in which Mr. Selwyn spoke was a volume of recommendation to Edmund, and his cold bow was exchanged for a cordial pressure of the hand and a glance of unrepressed admiration. The evening passed away, to use Bessy's favourite expression, like a fairy dream. There was something in Edmund's manner that had the power of enchantment, and his eyes, like the sun, gladdened all that they shone upon. Even Homer's cavern-like soul obeyed, this night, the magical open sesame of his smile, and suffered some of its hidden diamonds and gems to glitter on the beholder. Music added its charm to the sweet socialities of the hour. Victorine's piano, Edmund's flute and Vivian's violin made a most harmonious concert, and the soft, clear voices of the sisters chimed in like an angel chorus. Victorine played, as she did everything else, with all her heart and soul; her fingers flew

over the keys with a rapid, lightning touch, wild and thrilling, or lingered with a passionate depth of tone that made the heart ache and sigh from a consciousness of its own capabilities of love and sorrow. She was usually pale, but when she played or sang, her cheeks crimsoned and her lips glowed as if a fire were kindled and flaming within. Homer stood behind her chair, gazing upon her image reflected in the mirror. The harp of the shepherd minstrel had no more power over the evil spirit that possessed the first king of Israel than the music of Victorine on Homer. If life were made of music, and Victorine was the minstrel, Homer would have been the most amiable of human beings. Edmund, whose light breath warbled through the flute, making most ravishing strains, contemplated the other musicians with unconscious interest. Homer and Victorine must now be inseparably connected in his thoughts; she must be to him nothing more than a sister, as she had been in his more boyish years. He caught himself indulging in a transient feeling of envy that Homer had inspired love in this fascinating and impassioned being, leaving nothing but cold, calm friendship for him. Then he rejoiced that the fraternal jealousy which had so much embittered their

life would probably yield to the passion whose vassal he now was. He remembered the airy castles Bessy had built on the evening of his departure; the Grecian temple, the statues and pictures, where were they now? All vanished, and an altar fed with burning incense risen in their place. And Homer's baronial castle, where Emma was to preside, with its raised drawbridge and deep moat? It was now transformed to a moonlit bower, where the aroma of flowers and the breath of music mingled together and intoxicated the soul with love. He recollected Frank's prediction with regard to himself: that could never be; Laura was too artificial and vain; she could no more fill the capacities his heart had for loving than a shallow rill could fill the ocean's bed; he never should meet one who could. He would never marry, but give his talents to the world, his affections to his mother and Emma, who would never marry, likewise, but be the sweetest and best old maid that ever lived, and the young Estelle should be the darling of both.

While Edmund thus builds up new castles on the ruins of the old, let us exercise our fairy privilege of reading the thoughts of others, and see what Mr. Selwyn is thinking of while he keeps

time with his foot to the changing music. He, too, remembered Bessy's and Frank's gay prophecies, and thought how seldom the dreams of youth were realized. "This young artist," mused he, "is poor, but his genius will one day enrich him. If he loves Bessy, and is worthy of her, the want of wealth shall be no drawback to his success; I will help him on, but not make him too rich, lest the world lose the wonders of his art and he the blessings of industry. The proud, reserved Homer, how he hangs over that dark-eyed French girl, as if he would exclude her from the gaze of all! There is a web of misery weaving between them. I hope she may not love him too well, for he is incapable of domestic happiness. Good heavens! what a glance he just cast on Edmund because he chanced to be looking at Victorine. I foresee trouble on every side, though everything looks so bright and fair now. I must take Edmund away with me again: he is destined for a lofty sphere; my wealth, my influence, my best affections are his; he shall perpetuate his father's name not only untarnished, but brightened in fame. Noble, excellent boy! I wish I had a daughter to bestow upon him, that he might indeed be my own son."

When the family separated for the night, Ed-

mund lingered behind, that he might be a few moments alone with his brother. He longed for unreserved confidence, for an assurance that mutual trust and affection should henceforth exist between them. "Let me wish thee joy, brother," said he, pressing both hands in his; "you have won the first collegiate honours; you have adopted the profession of our honoured father; you love, and where you love are loved again. Homer, you must be happy now."

"No, I never shall be happy; I deserve not to be so. I distrust myself and every human being; I cannot help it. I've struggled with my nature ever since I was a mere boy, struggled like a giant, but it is all in vain. Love with me is a madness, and makes my misery, not my happiness. Edmund, this shall be an honest moment; I will tell you all that is passing within me, and then you shall hate me as you ought. Even this night, in the midst of the joy and rapture of welcome, which I declare to you I have shared most intensely, the dread that Victorine would love you better than myself has come over me, making the sweat drops of agony moisten my brow."

"What can I do to prove that I could not be a brother's rival? Homer, Victorine loves you,

and, once loved, you must be loved for ever. I could not, if I would, be your rival, but rather than inflict upon you even imaginary suffering, I would return to-morrow to the shores of Europe and become an alien from my country and home."

"What! and make my mother and sisters curse me? No! I was not born for society, and were I to go to some desert island and live like Robinson Crusoe, away from all mankind, I should only fulfil my destiny. The consciousness that I cast a gloom all around me makes me wretched, and yet I cannot change the nature which makes me gloomy, distrustful, jealous and misanthropic. Bear with me, if you can, Edmund, and pity me, for when I make others most unhappy, I am myself most miserable. You were born with a soul of sunshine, and you cannot imagine nor dream of that inward strife and storm which made me a sullen man when a mere boy, and will change my young manhood into prématurе old age."

"Have you ever sought strength of God, Homer? You say I cannot dream of inward strife and storm, but I have passions, strong passions, and if I did not pray for strength to resist their power, I might soon be their slave. I believe in God and revere his commandments; if I break them, I must

incur the penalty of their violation. Do you believe me when I say this?"

"Believe you, Edmund!"

"Then hear me, Homer, while in the name of that God I swear, with all the solemnity of an oath, that I will never willingly rival you in fame, fortune or love. I have no other security under heaven to give. Now let us be brothers indeed—brothers in heart as well as name. Let us be true to the memory of our father and the virtues of our mother, and the only rivalships between us be in filial love and devotion."

Edmund stretched out his hand, but Homer hastily rejected it, and throwing his arms round his brother's neck, leaned his head on his shoulder and wept. What ardent resolutions did he make for the future! What self-renunciations! What promises of amendment! What confessions of wrong and supplications for forgiveness! But who can say to the waves of human passion, "Thus far shalt thou go, and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed"? Who shall say, when the tempest rises, "Peace, be still"? who but the Spirit of God?

CHAPTER VIII.

CONFLICTING CLAIMS.

EDMUND'S return was a signal for festive meetings in the neighbourhood and town. Mrs. Worth's family was so much beloved that every event, whether of joy or sorrow, that occurred in it, excited the sympathy of all who knew it.

It was that joyous season when everything animate and inanimate expands and glows under a bright and genial sky; when the gardens and wild-woods are rich in floral splendour, the water rolls blue in the sunshine, and the meadows and plains wear that magnificent depth of colour which is seen only in northern latitudes. It was a season for youthful parties, gay gatherings at home and abroad, the morning ride, the evening walk or the sail in the pleasure-boat under the moonlight or stars. Frank and Laura Wharton came to welcome home the friend of their childhood, and to add to the gayety and variety of the scene. Frank had said, two years before, that Laura was made for

Bessy and Laura in Vivian's studio. "'Oh, what a beautiful picture!' exclaimed Laura, when Bessy carried her into Vivian's studio."—*Page* 163.

something better or worse than a fine lady. Trifling circumstances sometimes speak volumes.

"Oh what a beautiful picture!" exclaimed she, when Bessy carried her into the studio, where Vivian still lingered over the portrait he loved, adding here and there an almost imperceptible touch; "it looks like an angel, but not like you, Bessy."

"Not like her!" repeated Vivian.

"No; very slightly," replied Laura, making a telescope with her hand and taking a long look. "I should know it by the hair, and by its being here, but it's so much flattered, it's so exquisitely beautiful!"

"It is impossible that it should be flattered," said Vivian, warmly. "It is impossible even to do justice to the original."

"'Unless to mortal it were given
To dip his brush in dyes of heaven,'"

added Frank, who entered at this moment. "I agree with you, that it would be impossible to flatter Bessy."

"Oh yes! I knew you would say so, Frank," cried Laura, with an intelligent smile. "You, who have been Bessy's professed and favored admirer so long. But friendship, you know, is impartial; what is blind, I will not say."

Vivian coloured high, and cast a piercing glance at Frank.

"A beautiful picture must always be more beautiful than the original," said Bessy, "there is such a softness and smoothness in the colours, such perfect repose of features, such indescribable sweetness and calmness of expression. Painting is the dream of life; all the harshness of reality is lost in the brighter, mellower tints of imagination."

"You still love dreams, Bessy," said Frank; "you never utter a long sentence without bringing in a dream. Well, I am glad of it, for I am just beginning to find out what sweet things dreams are."

There was something in his tone and manner that called a blush to Bessy's cheek and a frown to Vivian's brow. It was the first time the idea of the gay Frank as a lover had entered the bosom of Bessy. It was the first time the dread of a rival seriously disturbed the peace of Vivian. Laura had consciously or unconsciously sent a dart that continued to rankle when the painter was left alone in his studio, and his pencil hung idly in his hands. In this attitude Laura found him when, after having seen Frank and Bessy seated at a game of

chess, she returned in search of her handkerchief, which she was sure she had left on the easel.

"Are you, too, dreaming, Mr. Vivian?" asked she, gayly. "There must be something infectious in the atmosphere, or something irresistible in Bessy's example. Every one dreams but me."

"I have been in a dream, I acknowledge," said Vivian, rising, "and I ought to thank you for awakening me."

"I!" repeated Laura, in a tone of surprise; "I do not understand you. I spoke sportively, but you give me so serious an answer you have excited my curiosity."

"Pardon me, Miss Wharton, but you made an allusion to your brother which was exquisitely painful. Will you explain it? Is he indeed the favoured lover of the original of that picture?"

Vivian spoke in a hurried, excited tone. He became very pale, and cast down his eyes like a man who does not wish to see the full extent of his danger. Strange thoughts took possession of Laura. She had depreciated Bessy's beauty because she began to envy its power. She had thrown out a random remark about Frank because she thought Vivian would admire her less if he believed her affections were engaged. She was not

prepared to utter a deliberate falsehood, though she had not hesitated to give the most erroneous impressions.

"Ask Bessy," said she, evasively; "she can explain everything better than I can." Then fearing he might follow her advice, and the benefit of this misunderstanding be lost to herself, she added, "I did not imagine I was revealing any secret. I thought every one knew that they had loved each other from childhood."

"Then it was an early attachment," said Vivian, very calmly.

"Oh yes, but it was never spoken of seriously till just before Edmund's departure, when it was all arranged between them." ("I have not said what is false," added she to herself, "for Frank did appropriate her to himself, and she never said a word of disapproval. I am sure that is equal to an engagement.")

"I am sorry I said anything about it," continued she, "since it seems to give you so much pain. I beg you not to repeat what I have said to Bessy, for she would never forgive me, and we have always been the most intimate friends—never had a quarrel in our lives."

"I thank you," replied he, coldly; "I will not

commit you in any respect. I shall not remain here long to disturb the happiness of any one."

"For Heaven's sake don't let what I have said drive you away. What will they think of it? How strange it will look! Pray, Mr. Vivian, don't be so rash, so precipitate."

"I am not rash, Miss Wharton. Don't you see how very calm I am? Be assured I will never make so poor a return for your kindness as to betray your confidence."

He began to gather up his brushes and pencils, and Laura felt that her presence was undesirable. She stole out of the room and entered the one where Bessy sat, impelled by an undefinable dread of Vivian's seeking an immediate explanation. The sight of Bessy's sweet, unconscious face leaning over the chess-board gave her a pang of remorse. She seemed absorbed in her game. Her head rested on her right hand, her left held back the ringlets from her brow.

"How lovely she looks!" thought Laura; "I am sure Frank loves her, whether she loves him or not, and I have only done her a kindness if I have saved her from having her affections entangled by a poor painter."

She soon saw the figure of Vivian standing

against one of the pillars of the piazza, and she could not bear the sight. She arose to find Emma, thinking she could look upon her with an untroubled conscience.

Bessy, absorbed in the interest of the game, and with her face inclined from the window, was not aware of the vicinity of Vivian, though her thoughts had been wandering toward him more frequently than she would be willing to acknowledge. "I wish I knew what to do with this bishop," said she, thoughtfully; "it troubles me."

"I could tell you a very good use to make of it," said Frank, "if you would let me."

"Nay, Frank, I am not in a jesting mood. I'm in a state of serious perplexity."

"And so am I. This bishop does not trouble you half so much as a certain gentleman troubles me—this Vivian."

"How foolish!" exclaimed Bessy, hastily. "If you do not attend to your game, I shall checkmate you, though you have so much the advantage of me."

"But seriously, Bessy, I want to know something more about this Vivian."

"This Vivian, as you are pleased to call him, sir, is ready to answer for himself," said a haughty

voice, and Vivian suddenly entered the room. Bessy started up in terror at this sudden apparition, and Frank also rose, though he gave back the haughty glance of Vivian with one of equal scorn.

"What do you wish to know of me, sir?" repeated he; "I can save this lady the trouble of replying."

"This lady!" cried Bessy. "Oh, Vivian, do not speak so angrily. If you knew Frank as well as I do, you would not regard it. He always speaks in a familiar way. If he were speaking of me to you, he would call me this Bessy."

"I said I wanted to know you better, sir," exclaimed Frank, "and I repeat what I said. Do you understand me?"

"You never will know me better, unless you seek me under another roof than this. I will never make this house a scene of contention. But if we meet again, sir, beware of the language you use."

"Oh, Frank, what have you done?" cried Bessy as Vivian, with hasty step, passed over the threshold, crossed the piazza and was gone.

"Done? nothing! If I had done what I ought, I should have knocked him flat on the floor.

What business had he to be listening? I am sorry I did not chastise him for his insolence. But, Bessy, you are weeping. I did not mean to wound your feelings. I would not do it for any earthly consideration. Don't weep any more, don't, Bessy; I cannot bear to see you weep."

Bessy sat, her face covered with her hands, leaning over the back of a chair. Every now and then the sound of a suppressed sob echoed dolefully through Frank's heart; he longed to comfort her, to take her in his arms, to wipe away her tears and tell her how beautiful and amiable and angelic he thought her. But he did not even dare to take a seat near her at this moment, such a sudden transition was wrought in his feelings. He felt as if he never more would venture to approach Bessy with familiarity, that instead of the free, gay rallies, reckless of offence, he was become the modest and respectful young man. But along with this gentleness and respect for Bessy there was a burning desire to humble and exile *that* Vivian, as he could not for his life help calling him. What business had he to put on such aristocratic airs and presume to monopolize Bessy, to the exclusion of her best and earliest friends?—he, a mere stranger,

whom, six weeks ago, nobody knew, and for whom, six weeks hence, nobody would care?

"Won't you speak to me, Bessy?" said he, at length. "I'll call Vivian back if you wish it, though I'll be sure to say it's for your sake, not mine."

"No, no, no!" answered she, without raising her head; "say nothing to him, nor to any one else. I do not wish to see him. But we have all been so happy together: even Homer has been joyous at times; and now it has all passed away like a dream."

"We shall be happier than ever," cried Frank, emboldened by the sound of her voice. "I'm sure I have a right to think that you should care more for me, your lifelong friend, than the acquaintance of a few passing weeks. I'm sure *that*—I mean Vivian—cannot think half so much of you as I do, who have known and loved you so long."

"Yes; we've always been like brother and sister, Frank."

"I don't mean this brother-and-sister sort of love, Bessy; that passed very well two or three years ago, but I've found out there's a great deal stronger love than what I feel for Laura."

"Don't speak of it now, Frank; my head aches

and throbs, and I know not what I am saying." She rose and walked to the door, still veiling as much as possible her flushed and tearful face. Pausing a moment on the threshold, she said, "Promise me, Frank, that there shall be no more angry words or looks. If they are given to you, return them not; speak not of it to Edmund, and forget it yourself."

"I would do anything in the world for your sake, Bessy, but I cannot promise, if any one gives a blazing glance, to look pleased and smile; I will try, however, to swallow my anger."

Frank checked himself, for he found he was talking to empty walls; Bessy was gone, and no trace left of her but her handkerchief, which lay upon the floor by the chair over which she had leaned. He took it up; it was moistened by her tears. His heart felt strangely moved by the impression of Bessy's tears, and by the knowledge that, however unintentionally, he had been the cause. Was it love for Vivian that made her weep? No; he would not admit that truth; she was far more distant and reserved to Vivian than to himself, and he recollected that several times when, on entering the room, they had both offered her a chair, she had taken his in preference to Viv-

ian's. This and several similar recollections warmed and softened Frank's usually gay heart He grew sentimental over this handkerchief moistened by the tears of youth and beauty. He folded it carefully, and placing it in his bosom, secretly vowed to devote himself henceforth valiantly and constantly to this fairest, sweetest, best and loveliest of all created beings. Frank certainly was in love; he had placed a maiden's handkerchief next his heart, and his thoughts ran on superlatives. He had no opportunity of proving his knight-errantry in the course of the day. Vivian did not appear, and Bessy remained in her own room on the plea of a sick headache—that invariable excuse for a sick and aching heart. In the evening, as Estelle sat in the window of Aunt Patty's chamber sewing on the immortal counterpane, she saw the figure of Vivian walking slowly up and down the garden walks, and sometimes he stopped and stood still a long time and looked down upon the ground. The child wondered at his protracted absence and his now lonely walk. A flight of steps ran from Aunt Patty's chamber into the garden, and down these steps Estelle flew, and in a moment was at Vivian's side.

"Why don't you come in?" said she, in a sweet,

earnest tone which it would have been hard to resist. "You have been gone so long, and you walk about so lonely!"

"I'm going away, Estelle, and I don't like to bid good-bye to friends; you must do it for me."

"Going away!" repeated Estelle, sorrowfully. "Oh, Mr. Vivian, don't say so; you haven't painted Aunt Patty's likeness and mine, and Aunt Patty may not live till you come back again."

"I shall never come back again," cried Vivian, in an agitated voice, putting his arms round Estelle and kissing her cheek, "but I never shall forget you."

"Come up in Aunt Patty's room and tell her the reason," said the child, pulling Vivian by the hand all the time she ran up the steps. "Come and see Aunt Patty, for I know it isn't right to go away so."

Vivian found himself in Aunt Patty's presence without any volition of his own, who smiled, nodded and pointed to a chair, while Estelle still held his hand, as if she feared he would vanish from her sight. "See what a beautiful counterpane Estelle is making for me!" exclaimed Aunt Patty, whose ruling passion became more and more absorbing. "I was afraid the pieces would get lost after a while,

and thought I would have them put all together; I mean to give it to my niece that's married first—Emma or Bessy. I expect it will be Bessy, for Emma is weakly, as I used to be, and serious. I always thought young Mr. Frank and Bessy would make a match; they used to play together when they were children. Here's a piece of Bessy's frock that she wore the first time you ever came here. It's blue, shaded in a kind of shell work; you know blue becomes Bessy, she's so fair. Blue always becomes a fair complexion; I never looked well in blue, because I was a brunette: red suited my complexion best. But I needn't talk about complexion now; I'm too old. All colours are alike to me."

Aunt Patty had mounted her hobby, and she went on telling the histories of myriad shreds, red, pink and brown, but Vivian heard her not. He gazed on the sample of shaded blue as if he had not the power to withdraw his eyes.

"May I keep this, Aunt Patty?" said he at length; "it will remind me of you when I am gone."

"Yes, keep it," replied she, "if you like; you've crumpled and twisted it so it wouldn't do to put in the quilt, and I have another piece like

it. But what makes you look so sad and talk about being gone? Has anything happened? Have you had any bad news from home?"

Vivian turned away his face and appeared intently occupied with Estelle's work. "Oh, Aunt Patty," cried Estelle, beseechingly, "he's really going away, and I shall not have your picture, after all, and what shall we all do without him? And what will sister Bessy say," continued she, turning to Vivian, "who loves to talk to you so much?"

"Bessy will not care when I am gone," replied he, in a softer tone. "There are others here whom she loves better than me."

"Yes, mother and Edmund, but what of that? She can love ever so many at a time."

Estelle could not comprehend the dark expression of Vivian's face as she uttered this consoling remark; she began to be afraid of him, he spoke so strangely and looked so wild and pale.

"Don't plague him about my picture, child," said Aunt Patty; "it isn't worth thinking about. I was willing to have it taken to please the children, so that they might remember how poor old Patty looked when she's dead and gone. I intended to be painted in my thunder-and-lightning calico, as Edmund calls it; here is a piece of it.

But it's no matter; it wouldn't have been fit to put up by the side of Bessy's, any way. Bless her heart! here she comes, looking as pale as a sheet. No; she's as fresh as a rose now."

Bessy opened the door, unconscious of the guest that honoured Aunt Patty's quiet apartment. She would have retreated, but Estelle ran to her and told her almost breathlessly that Vivian was going away without bidding any one good-bye, and that he was never coming back again, and that he didn't believe she cared whether he went or not.

"Am I so lightly given up, then," thought Bessy, "that for a single offence from Frank he is willing to go without a word of explanation, or even one kind good-bye? Is this the end of all his fond, flattering words? Is this the dark wakening of my life's young dream?"

That pride which is ever ready to gird and sustain the female heart in the hour of trial and desertion forbade Bessy from manifesting any weakness or regret before one who could trifle so wantonly with her feelings.

"Beg him to stay, Bessy," whispered Estelle.

"If Vivian wishes to go, why should we wish him to remain?" asked Bessy, in a cold, constrained voice.

"When I know that my presence is intrusive," cried Vivian, in the same tone, "it is natural that I should wish to depart."

There was a long pause. Aunt Patty took off her spectacles, wiped them over and over again, put them on and looked at Vivian and Bessy as if she thought she had made a mistake in their identity. In the simplicity of a lonely life which the sunbeams and clouds of love never passed over, the roses and thorns of love never strewed, the hush and the tempest of love never agitated, she was unskilled in that lore which could have enabled her to interpret the mysterious change in her young friends.

"Well," said she, for she had a great horror of long pauses, and was always the first to break them, "if you must go, may God bless you and take you in his holy keeping! You have a great talent entrusted to you. It isn't everybody that can copy the most marvellous works of God as you can. It's like making the deaf hear, the dumb speak and bringing the dead to life. It's like taking the power of the Almighty into your own hands and making a new creation. Then there is such a comfort in it when friends are dead and gone. If the Lord should please to take away Bessy, we would

never feel as if we really had lost her, as long as we had that sweet, beautiful picture of yours to look upon."

Aunt Patty, in her eloquence, had touched a tender chord. The idea that Bessy might die, and all that remained of her be that cold, still, bright shadow, the mockery of life, was more than Vivian could bear. He turned and looked fixedly on her. She sat with her head resting on her hand, her eyes bent upon the floor. She looked as if she had suddenly frozen in that attitude, so cold, still and white she looked.

"Are you ill, Bessy?" cried he, suddenly, approaching her.

She shook her head, and put out her hand with a deprecating motion. There was a quick revulsion in his feelings.

"She repels me from her," thought he, "even at this moment. She has loved him from childhood. She is betrothed to him, yet she smiled and listened to my vows. So young, so fair, yet so false! She has broken my heart, blasted my fame and withered my ambition. I never shall touch pencil, brush or canvas more. All the glorious visions that I hoped to see realized are fled. Nothing is left but a wide, dreary blank, an aimless, joy-

less, loveless existence, or perchance an early, undistinguished grave."

As these thoughts rolled darkly through Vivian's mind, the few short words, "Farewell, Bessy," were all that escaped from his lips. She was conscious of a quick, convulsive pressure of the hand, the sound of a shutting door, and then it seemed to her that there was a strange mingling of light and sound in her head, a rushing and roaring and flushing that made her giddy and sick and faint.

"Don't look so, Bessy!" cried Estelle. "What's the matter? Speak to me, Bessy. Oh, Aunt Patty, she can't! Give her your salts. Where's your hartshorn? Where's some water?"

Estelle ran about the room for salts, hartshorn and water, but neither could be found, and she was on the wing in another direction when Aunt Patty arrested her by suggesting a novel expedient:

"Give her a pinch of snuff, Estelle, quick! It will be as good as a dose of hartshorn. It will make her sneeze, and that will bring her to herself again."

Estelle, in her fright, snatched the snuff-box from Aunt Patty's tremulous hand and rushed up to Bessy, who still looked so frozen and white that it made her shudder. But the confusion in Bessy's

senses had subsided so far that she could hear distinct sounds, and Aunt Patty's proposal excited so much horror and disgust that she drew back her head in time to avoid the odious contact. Aunt Patty took the real old-fashioned yellow Scotch snuff, and though it did not mar perceptibly the beauty of her own face, it would have left a very disfiguring cloud round Bessy's fair nose.

"There, there! the very smell has revived her," cried Aunt Patty; "there's nothing like snuff, after all. Go quietly to bed, darling, and don't get to thinking and dreaming too hard. You've walked about too much in the moonshine lately, and I've always heard it was bad for the brains. They say, though, that angels fly about in the moonlight, and I've sometimes thought that I've seen them sitting under the trees and on the banks of the water where it shines like silver. Well, if they do come down from the skies, I know they will watch by your pillow; so good-night again, darling, and, as old Doctor Watts says, 'Holy angels guard thy bed.'"

The poetical chords in Bessy's soul vibrated in gentle response to Aunt Patty's kind good-night. She bent her head to receive her parting kiss, and retired with Estelle, who watched her with anxious

tenderness, fearing the return of that pale, death-like look.

The sudden departure of Vivian caused quite a sensation when it was made known at the breakfast-table. Laura, who well knew the cause, was the most astonished of all. She could not imagine, she could not conceive, the motive of his absconding so. Perhaps he had been detected in some disgraceful act, and was fleeing from the penalty of the violated law. At any rate, it was very rude and ungrateful in him to leave the family so abruptly.

Edmund, though he thought his conduct very strange and unaccountable, warmly defended him from Laura's sweeping changes. He was willing to stake his life on the purity of his moral character. Such genius, enthusiasm and sensibility never could be the accompaniments of meanness and vice. Edmund reasoned with the warmth of a young and generous spirit which, incapable of anything low and degrading, can hardly believe in the existence of vice.

Mr. Selwyn smiled with more worldly wisdom, though he loved the confidence that was born of rectitude and innocence. He was mortified at Vivian's departure, for if it should really result from

guilt, it would prove an error in his judgment, which he seldom committed.

Mrs. Worth and Emma said but little, but they thought of Bessy, and had some sad forebodings.

Frank thought it a fit of well-founded jealousy, but he would not betray his thoughts.

Estelle sat in silence, looking "unutterable things," for she had promised Bessy not to mention his strange visit to Aunt Patty's room.

What Bessy thought and felt was confessed to her mother the first time they were alone. All the love, hope, joy, fear and anguish of that pure, imaginative, loving, too susceptible heart was poured into the heart of one who gave back the tenderest sympathy blended with the most judicious counsels—one in whom the experience of riper years was softened by the still living and glowing memories of youth.

"Oh, mother," cried Bessy, at the close of this long, affectionate interview, "how grateful I am for your kindness, gentleness and sympathy! You do not blame me for my weakness and folly. I will struggle against it for your sake. And yet I was so happy in his companionship! After he came it seemed as if new faculties and sensibilities dawned

in my soul, as stars gleam out thick and bright on the firmament when the wand of night is lifted. Yet he was not like night. He was too bright, too glorious, for night. A thousand times, dear mother, I've felt as if I had existed before, and feelings and events seemed but the reminiscences of another shadowy world. Perhaps you do not understand me, but I'm sure my spirit lived before it animated this dust of mine. Yes, lived and glowed and loved. And when Vivian came, my heart sprang to meet him as one known, loved and remembered—the being of a fairer clime than this. Oh what a change there was! The skies looked bluer, the sun brighter, the birds sang a more melodious song; even your smile, my mother, seemed softer and sweeter than ever. I have lived, for a little time, the life of an angel, and now it is all over, and we will never speak of it again. And I will try to smile and let no one see that it is an effort to do so. I will henceforth live nearer to God."

Bessy looked up with such a heavenly expression that her mother thought she was too much assimilated to angels for an earthly union. Perhaps, like the daughter of Jephthah, she was about to be sacrificed on God's altar in the dew of her youth

and the light of her beauty—a sweet, fragrant offering, holy and acceptable in his sight.

"God bless thee, my child, and give thee strength to keep thy holy resolution!" said Mrs. Worth, tenderly embracing her, while her eyes were moistened with tears. "Take comfort from my experience. I have wept over the loss of one whom I loved with a love to which that you feel for Vivian must be light. Yes, Bessy, for it grew stronger and deeper and holier by time. Yours is but the flower that blooms in the sunshine, which a summer gale may destroy; mine the tree rooted into the soil that must be rent asunder ere it withers and falls. You remember when you were made fatherless, you remember well the first dark days of my widowhood, but you never knew, none but my Maker knew, the desolation, the agony of my soul, till I learned submission to his will, and could say that it was good that I had been afflicted. You are very young, my Bessy, and if this first blossom of love is doomed to an untimely blight, others will bloom to sweeten and gladden your youth. Nor has the grave interposed its cold, deep barrier between you and the object of your affections. Life and hope, and perhaps joy and love, remain for you. In the mean time, let us live

nearer to each other and to God, and if we cannot find happiness, we shall be blessed with content."

From this time a holier, closer, tenderer union than had ever before united them existed between Mrs. Worth and her beautiful child. They had looked into each other's heart, as the moon looks into the deep, silent waters, reflecting light, beauty and peace.

CHAPTER IX.

VICTORINE AND HOMER.

IN the immediate neighbourhood of Mrs. Worth there dwelt two aged women who were called, *par excellence*, the good old ladies. They sustained the relation of mother and daughter to each other, the latter having seen her threescore, the former her fourscore years and ten. They belonged to the nominal poor of the town, but when their misfortune and infirmities first threw them on the public for support, they were so much distressed at the idea of going to the almshouse that a number of individuals pledged themselves to furnish them the means of subsistence in a small but comfortable cabin which was gratuitously offered them. Their wants were but few, nor would they want their little long; they were called, through universal courtesy, old Lady Graves and old Lady Paine. Strangers would have thought there were no other old ladies in town, for they were always called *the* old ladies—a distinction they obtained as much by their piety and tenderness as by their superior age.

The children of Mrs. Worth had from earliest childhood considered it one of their greatest pleasures to visit this little cabin and be the almoners of their mother's bounty. They had many sweetheart gifts of their own, too, to offer, such as flowers and fruit, and many a delicacy which they denied themselves that they might earn the blessings of the aged. The old ladies still called them their little benefactresses, and Edmund was their dear, good, darling boy, though his head now towered over theirs. He had remembered them even in transatlantic shores, and brought them spectacles which they thought had rejuvenated their eyes, so light giving and faith inspiring is benevolence. The path which led to their dwelling was a straight, narrow lane margined on each side with green, and it was a smooth, beaten track. The grass was never suffered to grow in the centre, nor to be wantonly trampled down at the sides. In winter, when the snow came drifting down, covering the ground with one broad, deep, white crust, some kind hand always cut a nice trench up to the old ladies' door. When the farmers turned out in a body to carry wood to their minister and the sleds moved in long procession down the street, leaving a shining path behind them, a load was

always left quietly in the old ladies' yard, and it was sure to be nicely cut and piled for their handy use. Truly the path of poverty and age was smoothed before these time-worn pilgrims as they travelled hand in hand toward the grave, looking backward with gratitude and forward with faith to the green fields of the promised land. These humble women played no conspicuous part in the drama of life, and it may perhaps be asked, Why are they introduced in this collection of family pictures? Because they linked the young whose history we are writing with the past generations; because that low cabin was the scene of many of their purest joys; and more than all, because in drawing pictures we love contrasts of light and shade, and nothing can be more beautiful than to see the glow and brightness of youth side by side with the pallor and dimness of age.

Frank called these old ladies the belles of the town, and laughed at Edmund for his devotion to them, yet he had often been detected in stealthily sending large packets from the stores which came to them like fairy gifts without a name. Laura thought it very ridiculous to make such a fuss about the old grannies, and wondered how the graceful Edmund and the beautiful Bessy could

endure such crones. One evening Edmund entered the cottage to avoid a shower that fell just as he was passing. The door was open, and he stood a moment on the threshold unobserved to contemplate a picture exceedingly beautiful in his eyes. The elder of the aged pair sat in an arm-chair, her knitting in her hand, one needle shining under the border of her crimped cap above her silver hair, her ball pinned to her frock, a heart-shaped knitting-sheath fastened to her side. The mildness and innocence of second childhood softened a countenance no longer agitated by the storms of human passion. The waters were all still; not even a ripple disturbed the reflection of life's setting sun that dipped his mellowed beams in the waves. On her left the venerable daughter sat bending over a little wheel, her inseparable companion, whose low, monotonous humming constituted the music of her existence, for she was deaf, and the usual tone of the human voice did not penetrate her ear. She could hear, however faintly, the buzzing of her own little wheel, and she said it sounded like a distant waterfall, and it made her feel so peaceful she loved to hear it. Now she leaned forward and wet her fingers in the gourd-shell that hung by the distaff; then she twisted the shining flax into almost

Victorine reading to Lady Graves and Lady Paine. "Between them was seated Victorine, who looked like a bright flower springing up amid Alpine snows."—*Page* 191.

invisible thread, her foot patting the treadle-board, the pedal to this harp of industry. Between these two was seated a youthful maiden who looked like a bright flower springing up amid Alpine snows, with her pure white robes, her dark, unbound hair, her face partially inclined over the book of God which lay upon her knees, from which she was reading to the two aged Christians. Victorine had never appeared so interesting to the eyes of Edmund. He had scarcely looked upon her lately, so fearful was he of exciting the jealous madness of his brother. But now, withdrawn from the glance of that dark eye which watched his every motion, unseen too by herself, he dared to gaze upon her and think that time had wrought marvellous changes since she was the wild gypsy girl of the French menagerie. There was something soft and pensive in the expression of her usually too bright and flashing eye, and the holy act in which she was engaged threw an air of sanctity and spirituality around her virgin form. She was reading the Psalms of David, and their melody fell sweetly on his ear:

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations.

"Before the mountains were brought forth, or

ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God."

While she read this sublime prayer of Moses which is included in the hosannas of the sweet singer of Israel, the spinner leaned over the distaff, for the clear voice of Victorine glided through the bars that obstructed her hearing like the song of a bird through its grated cage, and the octogenarian dropped her knitting in her lap and raised her glimmering eyes to heaven, murmuring in response: "Few and evil have the days of the years of my pilgrimage been." Edmund would not have interrupted this beautiful scene had all the waters of the Deluge been pouring upon him, but when Victorine arose and laid the Bible upon the little table, beside the emblematic hour-glass, he crossed the threshold and was welcomed, as he always was, with grateful smiles and trembling pressures of the hand. "Bless the dear boy!" exclaimed old Lady Graves; "he has his father's steps and his mother's smile. I should know when he entered were I blind. Bless me, how the young plants shoot up! I remember when your mother came to town, a lovely, blooming bride, as young as Victorine, and your father had the princely air

which you have now, and now he's mouldering away in the grave, and you, who were not then, stand tall and man-like before me, as if you had risen up out of his ashes. Alackaday! what changes there are in the world! And I, poor old creature! who felt as old then as I do now, may live to see the day when your children may be dandled on my knees, nor fear the face of a hundred years."

"I shall never marry anybody, dear grandmother," answered Edmund, smiling. "I think it likely I shall live an old bachelor and take care of mother till she gets to be as aged as you are now."

"You!" said the old lady, shaking her head. "No, no; the Lord never created you for an old bachelor. I was just thinking, when you came in, what a beautiful match you and Victorine would make, both so good and kind and handsome, and living so close together, too; it's natural to be thinking about it."

"Somebody else is thinking about it," said Edmund, trying to speak with indifference. "Homer would not like to hear you unite any name but his with Victorine's. He had the advantage of me whilst I was the other side of the ocean."

"He!" repeated the old lady, in a sorrowful tone; "he's too dark and gloomy to make her or anybody else happy. When he was a little boy no higher than my knee, he used to sit like a raven in a corner, and refuse to play, because, he said, nobody cared anything about him, and he wouldn't go where he wasn't wanted. I love him because he's the son of your mother, and I love everything that belongs to her, even the blades of grass that grow round the stepping-stones of her door, but I don't want him to marry that young thing who's got such a tender heart; it would break if it were handled roughly. Don't be angry with an old woman for speaking her mind so plain; the Lord fixes all these things in his own almightiness, without taking counsel from any one, and I don't believe he ever matched these two."

Edmund felt that his old friend was leading him into dangerous ground, and he saw by Victorine's crimsoned cheek and embarrassed air that she was anxious to evade the subject. She walked to the window, and casting an uneasy look abroad, declared the rain was subsiding and she feared they would be wondering at her long absence. Edmund rose to accompany her; he had no umbrella, but he thought it would be safer to walk a short dis-

tance in the rain than to remain to hear a conversation of which Homer was the theme. They went out together, and had walked a few steps when Edmund, suddenly recollecting himself, exclaimed, "Return, Victorine, and I will go and bring you an umbrella and shawl. Strange I should have been so careless of your comfort!"

"No," answered she, hastily; "I love to walk in the rain; nothing exhilarates my spirits so much, and to walk with you, Edmund, reminds me of 'auld lang syne.' You are almost like a stranger to me now."

Victorine sighed, and Edmund knew that his reserve and coldness, contrasted with his former brotherly familiarity, must appear very strange and unkind to her. He could not tell her it was to avoid exciting his brother's jealousy that he imposed such a restraint on himself. He preferred bearing the reproach of caprice and inconsistency, which, he doubted not, she laid upon him, than expose Homer to blame.

"I am sorry to have you get so wet," said he, taking off his hat and holding it against the wind, so as to keep the rain, which now fell faster and faster, from beating in her face. Victorine protested against this gallantry, but Edmund reminded

her of the days of his boyhood, when he was proverbial for seeking the baptism of a summer shower. There was something exhilarating, as Victorine said, in hurrying through the fast-dropping rain, and the reminiscences of childhood thus awakened drew them closer together, and made Edmund forget for a moment that he was no longer a boy free as the wind, and with a heart as transparent as the raindrops. Their gay laughs mingled together; Victorine's long hair blew against his cheeks and fluttered among his dark-brown locks. They were children again, in this merry plight, and could not help feeling sorry when they reached the threshold, where they stopped, panting for breath, with glowing cheeks and wet, disordered hair.

"Wasn't that a glorious run?" cried Victorine; "I wouldn't have missed it for Gilpin's thousand pounds."

Victorine turned her sparkling eyes to Edmund as she spoke, but a coming figure "cast its shadow before" and prevented his reply. Homer had seen their approach from the window, and the lion passion lurking in the bottom of his heart leaped from its covert. Edmund saw by the expression of his countenance all that was passing within, and the merry laugh died on his lips. He immediately ex-

plained their unexpected meeting and the circumstances of their return, inwardly reproaching himself for experiencing so much gratification from an accident which caused his brother anguish. But the cloud still lowered on Homer's brow. The shower passed over, and

> "Far up the blue sky a fair rainbow unrolled
> Its soft-tinted pinions of purple and gold."

Brighter and brighter still glowed its seven-fold beams, till another paler bow appeared within, and still another beauteous apparition, till the triple arch spanned the heavens, reflected its dyes on the green, glittering earth and panting leaves and mirrored itself in the glassy depths of the streams. The family all gathered in the piazza to gaze on the messenger of peace, standing, like the apocalyptic angel, with one foot on land and one foot on sea, its garments dipped in the sun, and they gazed till the glory gradually departed and nothing was left but a soft gray expanse, soon covered with the deeper gray of twilight. Bessy, at Mr. Selwyn's request, repeated Campbell's magnificent address to the rainbow, which he said was the most unrivalled of poems, but Emma ventured to assert, much as she admired the stanzas, the simple and

sublime annunciation in Scripture of the "bow of God set as a covenant on the retreating clouds of the Deluge" surpassed the descriptions of human genius.

Yes; the shower passed away, the glorious rainbow faded away, the deep gray of twilight blackened into night, yet still the cloud lowered on Homer's brow. The lamps were lighted, the evening circle gathered together, still, Homer, like a broken link in the family chain, remained apart, and the brightness of that chain was impaired. Mr. Selwyn and Emma sat down to a game of chess, his favourite recreation, and one which suited well her serious and abstracted turn of mind. Since he had discovered her talent, he had so frequently called it into requisition that now, whenever he began to arrange the men on the board, she considered it a mute challenge, and immediately relinquished whatever occupation she might be engaged in, grateful that she could contribute in any degree to the amusement of so noble and generous a being. Like all great men, he had his weaknesses, and one was, he did not like to be defeated. Emma played well enough to interest him without the fear of being often beaten, and on that account he preferred her to more experienced champions. Emma had tact

enough to perceive this, and she never tried to play too well. Absorbed in this quiet, intellectual game, the inequalities of Homer's manner, which often threw a shade over the evening circle, were seldom perceived by them. Victorine played some of her sweetest songs in concert with Edmund's flute, but the evil spirit departed not. She continued to play, however, after Edmund had laid down his flute, and caught up in a wild, brilliant manner snatches of melody, changing as the notes of a mocking-bird, as capricious and as sweet.

"Oh, Victorine," exclaimed Laura, throwing down a book with which she had been playing, rather than reading, "have mercy on our ears. You've banished Bessy already. She seems to have lost her love for music lately. Why, what has inspired you so to-night? That fine run in the rain with Edmund? How happened you to meet at those evening belles', as Frank calls them? I really think it must have been a concerted plan. You and Edmund both look guilty; see how she blushes! Goodness! what's the matter with Homer? What sent him out so suddenly? Frank, didn't you observe how strange Homer looked?"

"How can I hear or observe anything," cried Frank, "when you overpower everything with

your rattling tongue? Victorine, don't mind her nonsense, but play my favourite song before you rise. I've been waiting patiently for it the whole evening."

Frank did observe, with pain and displeasure, the effect of his sister's levity, and sought to divert the attention of Victorine.

"I cannot play any more to-night, Frank," cried she, "though you are very kind to ask it of me."

She rose with a heightened colour and left the room, giving Laura a look, as she passed, of unutterable reproach.

"Mercy! what a dull place this is getting to be!" cried Laura, trying to look innocent. "One cannot say a word in jest but everybody takes it up as seriously as if they were going to fight a duel. Look at Emma, glued down to that chessboard, her head leaning on one hand, the other stretched out over the queen, like a Roman shield in the day of battle. I don't believe she would hear if seven thunders were pealing in her ears." Emma looked up with a sweet smile that belied her words. Laura lowered her voice, and continued: "Do you know, Frank, that I think Emma is really half in love with old Mr. Selwyn?" Emma did not look up

again, but her pale cheek turned red, and the next move she lost her queen.

Mr. Selwyn, of whom it might in truth be said that while he was playing chess he would not hear if seven thunders uttered their voice, kept calling out check, check, till she had no place to turn, and gladly surrendering, she retreated from the board, giving Laura a mild but very rebuking glance as she too passed out of the room.

"Why, where is everybody going?" exclaimed Laura; "there must be something extraordinary to see." She went out herself, with the waltzing step, leaving Frank seriously angry at her undaunted levity.

In the mean time, Victorine wandered in the piazza, whither Homer had wandered before, and they met, face to face, beneath the glimmering stars that flashed here and there in the "darkening firmament of June."

"Victorine," said he, suddenly, "walk with me in the garden; I cannot speak to you here."

"It is damp after the shower," answered she, with a slight shudder.

"You did not fear the dampness," replied he, in a bitter tone, "when you were clinging to Edmund's arm."

"Come!" cried she; "I do not fear it now;" and yielding to his motion as he drew her hand round his arm, she followed him through the garden walks into an arbour whose shade, soft and refreshing in a dry, sultry evening, now drooped heavily over them, surcharged with the rain and the dew.

"Your hand is very cold, Victorine; I do not wish to chill you."

"It is not half so cold as my heart. There is nothing so chilling, so freezing, as suspicion."

"I know that but too well. I feel now as if a girdle of ice were round my heart. But certainty is not suspicion. Victorine, I *know* that you love Edmund."

"Homer, I came here to be catechised, examined, questioned and cross-questioned. I expected such an inquisition, and I can bear it. But I did not come here to be insulted, and I will not bear it." The quick-flowing blood of the French rushed in a burning current to the face of Victorine, though darkness rested upon it as a veil, and she turned proudly from him.

"Stay!" cried he, forcibly detaining her as she attempted to leave the grotto; "it is not an insult to assert a fact visible as the sun at noonday.

When did you ever manifest in my company the joy, the rapture, that beamed in your eyes this day under circumstances that would have drowned a common emotion? When did you ever give me such a look as you turned on Edmund, when the sight of me seemed to change you into stone? Why go away in stealth to a spot which you knew Edmund daily visits, if it were not in the hope, the certainty, of meeting him unconstrained by my presence? Victorine, you are silent; you cannot answer me."

"Cannot answer you!" repeated she, indignantly; "what use in reasoning with a madman? And yet I will reply in justice to myself, not you. How can my eyes beam with rapture on one whose brow is ever clouded by suspicion or darkened by jealous passion? As well might the volcano wonder that the flowers of the valley withered under its breath, as well might the ice marvel that it chills the breast on which it falls, as you, distrustful, jealous and unjust as you are, as you wonder that I cannot look on you with joy. You accuse me of visiting by stealth a place familiar to us all as our own family hearth—where we all go and come without ceremony or care, and where I was as likely to meet you as Edmund. Yes, it was likely

I went by stealth, as if ashamed of my purpose, under the light of the sun, and it was likely, too, that I meditated falsehood and guilt by the side of those aged ones almost enveloped with the shadows of the grave, with the word of God upon my knee and its sacred texts upon my lips! Oh, shame on you, Homer!—shame on your unmanly accusations! I care not for them, I scorn them all, but it grieves me, it pains me, to see you sunk in my estimation, unworthy of my respect, an object of pity and condemnation."

"All this from you, Victorine?" cried he, in a subdued voice.

"Yes," answered she, excited beyond the power of repressing her emotions—"all this, and more. You must read my character better. You looked upon me first as a gay, sportive girl, with more vivacity than feeling, whose sallies of mirth amused even you. You believed me next a fond, confiding maiden, with more tenderness than pride, whose love, once won, must be an inalienable possession. You do not know me yet. I grant that I have gayety and tenderness and trust, but I have an independent spirit, too, that will not brook the vassalage of your passions; an elastic one that rebounds when it is trampled upon; a strong one that would

rend asunder the bonds that confine it, were they bars of iron and triple steel."

Homer listened in amazement to this burst of indignant and outraged feeling from the usually gay and tender Victorine. The soft young girl was converted into the accusing judge ready to pronounce upon him the stern sentence of the law. She seemed lost to him for ever. His own folly and madness had sealed his doom. Like the base Judean, he had thrown from him a gem richer than all his tribe, and he must mourn through life the consequences of his guilty rashness. A mist was swept from his vision. He saw passion and truth standing side by side in all their deformity and purity, and he wondered that he could ever have yielded to the dominion of the former. He remembered the vow of his generous brother, and he knew that the lips of Edmund had never been polluted by a falsehood. He loathed himself, he repented in dust and ashes. As these thoughts revolved in his mind, he sat with his face buried in his hands, bowed down with the weight of self-humiliation.

Victorine could not see his countenance, but she could see his bowed attitude and hear the deep sighs that mingled with the soft moaning of the

night breeze. Indignation instantaneously melted into sorrow. She sat down beside him and put her hand on his hot brow. "Oh what a pity," she exclaimed, "that you will not let us love you as we might—that you will not be happy as you ought! We might live in so much love and harmony, such a charming family of brothers and sisters; such a sweet, angelic mother; so many blessings and so many friends; and then, to crown the whole, such a gracious God to watch over and love us! Look up, Homer; let us try to be happy once more. Let us forget and forgive what we have both said. I have been too much excited, and carried my resentment too far."

"Forgive you!" cried he, clasping his arms around her with a wildness and impetuosity that made her tremble; "I do not merit this gentleness. I deserve nothing but indignation and wrath. I know I am unworthy of your love, and that I have come like a dark shadow over your loveliness and youth. And yet, Victorine, if you only knew how I love you; if you could look into my heart and see the intensity, the idolatry, of my passion; if you could know, while I am torturing you, what agony I am enduring myself,—you would pity me as the veriest wretch that ever lived. Would to

heaven that I had shut out the first thought of love; that I had never dared to dream of the possibility of your loving me; that I had not encroached on your gentle and pitying nature, and forced you into communion with a spirit like mine! I know that I can never make you happy, that I must ever be subject to these paroxysms of madness, and that I ought at this moment to resign you for ever, and yet the rending asunder of body and soul must be less painful than the idea of such a separation."

Victorine listened, tearful and agitated, to these impassioned words, and felt herself borne up on the strong current of his emotions above all selfish considerations. She cared not whether she was happy herself or not. She wished Homer had never loved her so unwisely, so passionately, so jealously, but since he did so love her, she would endeavour to bear with patience the infirmities of his nature. She would repress the delight, pure and innocent as it was, that she felt in Edmund's society, rather than inflict upon him one voluntary pang. She would close every avenue to jealousy with golden bars that could not corrode. Every look, word and motion should be schooled to the discipline he required. In this self-sacrificing, martyr-like mood, she was willing to be stretched

on the bed of Procrustes, to be tortured into any shape or form, provided she could secure the happiness of Homer.

Victorine forgot that she was the child of impulse, and that she could no more guard herself from its influence than the young flower can resist the gale that bows its pliant stem.

CHAPTER X.

A MOUNTAIN PIC-NIC.

HAVE you ever seen a clearing-up shower?—how, after a long, dreary storm, when the clouds have been gathering and apparently dispersing, then gathering again, coming down in a heavy, drizzling rain, a darker cloud condenses, the lightning burns on its blackness, the thunder bursts from its bosom and the drops fall thick and plashing till they mingle in one broad sheet of water, threatening to deluge the earth? Suddenly the clouds roll back, the blue sky trembles through the chasm, then the sun shines forth in its glory; the birds fly warbling from their coverts, the trees shake the raindrops from their green leaves, the flowers lift up their fair heads, looking timidly toward heaven, and all nature rejoices as in the morning of its nativity. Then follow long genial days of sunshine—sunshine without a shade, save here and there a solitary white cloud floating gently along till it melts in the soft tranquillity of blue. There are clearing-up showers in the moral world,

also, when long lowering doubts and sullen suspicions gather into the thunder-cloud of passion, which discharges its electric fires, and leaves the heart purified and invigorated.

Victorine now rejoiced in this moral sunshine, and smiled, sang and sported once more. Bask a while in this sunshine, thou child of sunny France, and let thy young spirit bathe joyously in its beams, for the dark hour may yet come, and the sunshine depart, and the air blow chill on thy soul.

Do you remember the arbor where Homer and Victorine sat the night of the clearing-up shower? Will you walk there again, in the calm, glowing twilight, and take a seat by the two who sit there side by side in the shadow of those clustering vines? Do not imagine that it is Homer and Victorine lingering still on the trysting spot of their reconciliation. It is Frank and Bessy, and by the soft and pensive hour, the retired, romantic place, it may be supposed they have met to converse on some sentimental theme, and that Vivian has been thus soon supplanted, so fickle is the heart of woman deemed. Will you listen, as their voices sound low in the hush of that still hour, and decide upon the truth and constancy of Bessy? They have been sitting there all the time yon bird has been singing

its vesper hymn to the God of the twilight, and you must discover the secret of their past conversation by the words they are now uttering.

"No, Frank," said Bessy, making a kind of fairy lattice-work of the tendrils of the vine; "I know that my feelings will never change. I grant that all you say is true, that his absence is inexplicable, perhaps unjustifiable, and that I may be doomed to waste the season of youth and hope in the sadness of memory. I have always loved you as a friend, and had no being come who awakened all the capabilities my heart has of loving, I might have been satisfied with this gentle feeling, not knowing that a stronger and deeper existed within me. But now it is all in vain. Don't speak of it again, Frank. It makes me very unhappy. It fills me with a sense of injustice and wrong, and yet, if I know my own heart, I have never deceived you. In my wish to be ingenuous, I fear I have sacrificed delicacy to truth and made an avowal which ought to cover me with blushes."

The sweet roses of modesty did bloom most beautifully for a few moments on Bessy's cheek. The hue of the rose had lately been wanting there.

"Fool that I was," exclaimed Frank, "not to think of this before Vivian came! I never cared

about any one but you, but because I was a foolish, hairbrained youth that liked to make people laugh you thought I could not think and feel deeply. I did not know how deeply and strongly I could feel myself till I met that Vivian here, and found him monopolizing you as all his own. If I had only been first to speak, for I was first to love! He paints divinely, it is true, but who couldn't paint you, Bessy? I could make an angel of you myself with one stroke of the pencil. He writes charming poetry; so can I. I made more than fifty verses on you last night. I never wrote any in my life till you inspired me. Bessy, you could make a painter, a poet or an orator of me—perhaps a great and good man. If you cast me off, I shall be nothing but a discontented, moping bachelor who will not live out half his days."

"Now, dear Frank, pray listen to me one moment, even as to a sister, and do not be angry or think I mock your constancy. But I know your nature, and know that disappointment cannot long rest heavily on you. You will throw off the weight and feel lighter and happier from contrast, and there is one, Frank, whom you have known as long as you have me ten thousand times better than I am, who might indeed make you a great

and good man, and whose affections might possibly be won. By and by all you now feel for me will pass away like a dream of the morning: everything earthly will pass away; but she, if you would love her, Frank, she would lead you gently up to heaven, where there are no dreams to delude, but all is glorious reality."

Bessy sighed and passed her hand over her brow, wishing she had the same calm, angelic temperament as her sister Emma. Frank crushed the grass under his feet, pulled off the twigs of the bower and strewed them on the ground, then rose and walked backward and forward as far as the length of the arbour would permit, but finding himself compelled to turn too often, he sat impatiently down.

"Don't talk to me of another," said he. "I know whom you mean; she's a dear, good girl, but no more to be compared to you than a glow-worm to a star. I am not thinking of myself now. I don't care for myself. If you were happy, I could willingly hang myself to-morrow. But when I hear you sigh and look up so sadly, I feel as if a two-edged sword were passing through my body. I'll tell you one thing, Bessy, if it's the last breath I have to utter: if that Vivian does prove to be a

rascal, as I'm terribly afraid he is, I'll shoot him, if they put a halter on my neck the next moment."

"Don't shoot *me*, Frank," cried Estelle, laughing, and catching his last words as she bounded into the arbour. "Bessy, mother says you mustn't stay here any longer, for the dew is beginning to fall. Aunt Patty wants you to cut out some more hexagons for her bed-quilt, and I want you to press those flowers for me I gathered this morning. Everybody wants you in the house."

"Not Homer, if Victorine is near," said Frank.

"No, perhaps not," answered Estelle, thoughtfully; "they are reading a book together, and Mr. Selwyn is showing some pictures to Emma and explaining them all beautifully. But Edmund—I know Edmund wants you, for he is sitting alone, looking so serious, with his head leaning on his hand, just so;" and she rested her blooming cheek pensively on the palm of her right hand. Estelle ran before them to gather flowers sweeter than ever at that dewy hour.

Frank said in a low voice to Bessy, "Do you know what I have been thinking lately? What if Edmund should love Victorine?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Bessy so loudly that Estelle dropped her flowers and looked round, but

the next moment she was on the wing. "Heaven forbid!" continued Bessy, in a lower, more earnest tone. "What wretchedness would it bring on himself! What misery on others! Breathe not such a supposition in Homer's ear, if you would not drive him mad."

"Fear not, Bessy; I have more consideration than you think I have. But I am vexed that Homer took it into his gloomy head to fall in love with Victorine while Edmund was away. He isn't fit to be a lover. She thinks she loves him because he was the first one that ever bowed at her shrine, and she was proud of taming such a lion. But she fears him now more than she loves him, and at the bottom of her heart I know she must often wish that Edmund had wooed her instead of Homer. Who could help loving Edmund? I do not think it any disgrace for a girl to fall in love with him, even unauthorized and unasked. His every glance and smile have witchery in them. Victorine's too. Such a splendid girl! I was terribly smitten with her myself, once, when I saw her in that flowered frock. Such an eye! such a mouth! If it had not been for you, I should certainly have rivaled Homer. Fool that I was, to let *that*—"

Frank bit his lips, and Bessy could not forbear to smile, though the new idea which he had suggested with regard to Edmund filled her with alarm. She had been so selfishly absorbed in her own regrets and sorrows she had scarcely noticed what was passing around her. She reproached herself for her want of sympathy, her forgetfulness of the happiness of others. When she entered the house, she took a seat by Edmund, who sat, as Estelle had described, apart and abstracted, with a paler cheek and sadder brow than she had seen him wear since his return. "How forgetful, how neglectful, have I been," thought she, "of this dear, irreproachable brother of mine! How completely swallowed up in self! Shall I brood in sullen secresy over the image of a stranger, oblivious of one whom I have always loved with such idolizing affections? and he too may be unhappy."

These self-reproachful thoughts gave an inexpressible softness to her countenance and tenderness to her manner, as, seated closely at his side, she leaned her arm in his lap, and her radiant ringlets glittered on his breast. There was something so endearing in her attitude, so supplicating in her look, so beautiful and graceful in her whole appearance, that Edmund gazed upon her for a moment as

upon a lovely picture; then putting his arm around her, he drew her closer to him, and the shadow passed away from his brow. Estelle came running in with her white apron full of flowers, and sitting down on the carpet the other side of him, began to arrange them into groups. "Stop!" cried Laura, approaching them. "Don't move, any of you; you must be attitudinizing for a picture. I never saw anything so pretty in my life. I wish Vivian were here. Don't you, Bessy?"

"No, she don't," answered Estelle, covering Bessy's short, quick sigh with the sound of her eager voice. "She wouldn't beg him to stay when I asked her, and she didn't even bid him good-bye. I don't like Mr. Vivian at all for not staying and painting Aunt Patty and me, when he'd got the big canvas all ready. I heard Aunt Patty tell Bessy the other day, if he did come back, not to have anything more to say to him, for she liked Frank the best, after all."

"And did Aunt Patty say that?" exclaimed Frank. "Bless the dear old soul! I'll go this minute and take a pinch of snuff with her and praise her bed-quilt till my tongue aches."

"Wait for me," cried Estelle, and gathering her flowers up in her apron, she scattered some of the

roses over Edmund's and Bessy's heads, and flew off with Frank to give the rest to her beloved Aunt Patty.

"Edmund," cried Laura, "you are really growing dull. You don't think of making yourself agreeable; you have given up all our pleasant walks and rides, except a walk in the rain sometimes. I don't believe any one cares about my company. I mean to go home to-morrow."

"No," said Edmund, catching by sympathy her gay tone. "I plead guilty to your charge, but I will redeem my character. I will plan a voyage to the moon, if you please, or a walk to the summit of Mont Blanc."

"When you run off into impossibilities, I know you don't mean to do anything. If you would plan an excursion to yonder mountain"—and she pointed to the blue outline of one that gracefully undulated in the distance on the still glowing horizon—"there would be some gallantry, and practicability too, in the act."

"Your word shall be law!" cried he. "I have been on the summit, and a more enchanting prospect never opened on the ravished eye. The ascent is steep, but the difficulty only adds interest to the expedition. We can ride to the foot of the

mountain, and then begin our pedestrian journey. But it will never do for you, Laura, for you cannot go in satin slippers, and you never deign to wear anything of grosser materials."

"Oh yes; I would wear wooden shoes for the sake of the novelty. I am willing to put on a homespun frock if you will promise to escort me to that delightful place. I am actually dying of ennui, and the very thought of something new gives me new life. Bessy, will you go? Abstracted Mr. Homer and sentimental Miss Victorine, will you go? Good Mr. Selwyn and grave Miss Emma, will you go?"

She went gayly from one to the other, making low, sliding curtseys without waiting for an answer, and laughing at their sudden look of curiosity.

"Go where?" asked Homer, alarmed at the thought of a party of pleasure.

"To the mountain, which always reminds me of Ossian's ghosts, in its mantle of mist," answered Bessy.

"If the mountain cannot come to us, I suppose we can go to the mountain," said Mr. Selwyn, with an assenting smile, and the rest of the evening was employed in arranging this romantic excursion.

They all went out to have a better view of the azure-crowned peak, and lingered till evening set a brilliant diamond on its brow, and then another, till it was encircled by a sparkling bandeau of starry gems. Beautiful did it look invested with the regality of heaven in the stillness of the mid-summer night.

"What was the name of this beautiful mountain?" perhaps some geographer may ask, tracing the outlines of the map of imagination, undecided where to pause. Its name might be told, for it has a name, and it was baptized with the mists of morning, and it is a sweet, euphonious name given by the Indians who once hunted at its base. But let it now be incog.

Reader, art thou a stranger far from the home of thy childhood and the scenes of thy youth? Does not the thought of the green fields and blue hills of thy native soil make thy pulses quicken and thy cheek glow? Do you not seem to sit once more under the shade of some dear familiar tree, planted by the hand of your forefathers, and feel the same gale that fanned your infant brow rustling through its leaves? In the horizon that bounded your vision was there one lone hill rising like an angel's throne above the valley that en-

circled it which caught the first gleam of the rising sun and arrested its last purple ray? And has not your mother directed your young eye to its summit, and talked to you of the days of old, when God came down upon the mountains and hallowed them with his presence; of Sinai with its thunders and lightnings and thick smoke; of Nebo, where the aged prophet sat and gazed upon that land he was not permitted to enter; or of Calvary, once stained with the Redeemer's blood? If there is one spot among the granite hills round which such associations cluster, imagine this to be the same, and it will be sacred in your eyes.

By the rising sun— No; it was long before the rising sun that Estelle wakened, roused her sisters and knocked at her brother's door. They were to have a very early breakfast, so as to start before the heat of the day commenced. She had hardly closed her eyes the whole night, she was so excited at the thought of climbing to the tip top of a mountain, and seeing their own home too through a telescope after she reached there. She felt taller, older and wiser. She made Aunt Patty promise to sit with her head out of the window all day, so that she could see her too. If she had asked her to step out of the window on the mountain-top, she would

involuntarily have answered "Yes," for she never dreamed of saying *No* to Estelle. The young party were in readiness long before the horses and carriages came to the door, though Laura was the last to make her appearance, as usual, all *à la mode.*

"Now, Laura, you know you can't clamber up the mountain in that dress," cried Frank. "Who ever heard of one's putting on a fine fashionable silk to jump about among the rocks and shrubs? Those kid slippers, too, and lace stockings! Look at Emma and Bessy; they can frisk about as they please, without danger of leaving half their clothes behind them. I beg pardon; I don't believe Emma ever was guilty of friskiness in her life."

"It is difficult to frisk about, as you say, Frank, with a feeble body," said Emma, "but I feel so much stronger and better now than I once did I don't think I shall consent to stay in that little cave halfway up where you talk of depositing me."

"Forgive me, Emma; I didn't mean to remind you of one ill of mortality this delightful morning. You looked so bright and rosy that I forgot you were the invalid."

"She's thinking of what a charming ride she will have with Mr. Selwyn," said Laura. "If I were Emma, I should be tired of such an old beau."

"How ridiculous to call Mr. Selwyn a beau!" exclaimed Emma, with some asperity, "and always to be calling him old! He is very far from being an old man, and he has all the warmth and enthusiasm of youth, still."

"I dare say he has," said Frank, laughing, "and he is one of the finest-looking men I ever saw. If I were injured, I would go to him for redress; if I were weak, for protection; if poor, for relief. There, Emma, I have made a speech expressly for you. As for Laura's calling him old, it is nothing but spite, just as children call everything old out of their reach. You remember the little boy who told his mother he hated and despised that old cake when she was resolute in denying it to him."

Here Frank stopped, and burst into a louder laugh at the sight of Estelle with a basket on her arm half as large as herself.

"What do you ask for your butter, chickens and eggs, my little market-woman?" cried he, trying to peep under the lid, to her great displeasure.

"You are so rude, Frank!" cried she, pushing him back with a dignified air. "You always pull everything so. I won't give you any, if you don't let my basket alone."

"Well, if I can't use one sense, I can another,

and the nose is as good as the eyes sometimes. You've got something there that smells very inviting, so I'll be on my good behavior now. You look like a sweet little flower-girl, with that basket hanging gracefully on your arm, Estelle."

"Oh, I was a big, old, ugly market-woman just now. You change your tune too quick, Master Frank," cried the child, archly curling her ruby lip.

"I'm glad to see you in such fine spirits, Frank," said Edmund.

"All forced," replied he, sighing, but his deep sigh only made others smile; "and yet there is something exhilarating in rising so early, breathing the clear morning air, and having the prospect of a fine ride, a fine dinner on the mountain, and ever so many charming adventures."

"Oh yes!" said Bessy, with one of her long-absent, sunny smiles, "we must have some adventures, indeed. Victorine shall be the gypsy of our party, Homer the seer, and I will be the prophetess; and oh, such visions of glory will I call up that you will all pray me to spare your aching sight."

"Frank and I will be your knights," said Edmund, rejoicing in Bessy's returning sunshine; "Laura and Emma two ladies fair, and Estelle—"

"Our little market-woman," added Frank.

Here Mr. Selwyn drove up to the door in a splendid landau, which he had brought from Europe, and which had excited the admiration of the country people. His noble and aristocratic appearance corresponded well with the elegance of his equipage, and the fashionable Laura would not have disdained a seat at his side. But the hand was first held out to Emma, who sprang in so lightly that Frank might have accused her of being guilty of friskiness.

"Who else will grace my chariot?" said Mr. Selwyn, looking smilingly on the fair faces in the doorway.

"Me!" cried Estelle, tugging along with her basket; "I want to ride in that carriage."

Estelle seemed to flutter through the air, so quickly did Mr. Selwyn accomplish her wish, and, laughing and triumphant, she looked up to Aunt Patty, who, seated in her arm-chair, beheld from her open window the departing group.

Edmund was to accompany Laura and Bessy in the family carriage, Homer and Victorine to ride together in an open barouche, and Frank to follow on horseback.

"Oh, how I wish mother and Aunt Patty were

going!" cried Estelle in the prodigality of her joy; "they would have such a nice ride."

Mrs. Worth, who stood on the threshold, shook her head and smiled, though a tear trembled in her eye. The figure of Mr. Selwyn reminded her of her husband, and the remembrance of her own youthful love-lighted days rushed back upon her soul.

"Don't ride too far up the mountain," said the anxious mother; "and, Emma, don't walk too much; you must promise to rest in the cave."

"I will take excellent care of her," replied Mr. Selwyn. "Trust her with me, and she shall return in safety."

"Come back before it is dark," called out Aunt Patty; "the carriages may upset and your necks be broken."

"Don't prophesy evil, Aunt Patty," cried Edmund, kissing his hand to her in token of adieu; "if you do, you will be a Cassandra, doomed to be unbelieved."

They were just about to give the signal to depart when a man on horseback rode into the yard and handed a letter to Homer. He read it, knit his brow, looked at Victorine, and exclaimed, "How unfortunate! I am summoned away upon some business connected with my father's estate which

ought to have been attended to long ago. It cannot be deferred. What shall I do?"

"Go, by all means," cried Victorine, springing from the barouche; "I will stay behind."

"Thank you, thank you!" exclaimed he, warmly pressing the hand which he still held; "then it is no disappointment to me. I did not wish to go but for your sake."

"No, no, Victorine must not stay," cried every voice but Edmund's; "there is room for her here, and here, and here. We will not go without Victorine."

"No, it is better that I should stay, since Homer wishes it," said Victorine, but the flush on her cheek and the tremor of her voice denied the resignation of her words. Homer remained silent, and made figures on the ground with his whip. Victorine felt his selfishness more than her disappointment, and her heart rebelled against him.

"Cannot I transact your business, brother?" asked Edmund, approaching Homer. "I shall not be missed half as much, for there's a driver to our carriage, and Laura and Bessy will be protected by being in company with Mr. Selwyn and yourself."

Laura pouted, and declared she would not go

without a gentleman to escort her, and loudly protested against Homer's selfishness.

"No one can transact the business but myself, as the eldest son," replied Homer, gloomily, watching the changing countenance of Victorine, "and as no one will regret my absence, it matters not to me. Victorine, I will not force your inclinations. I see you wish to go, and will probably be far happier without me."

"How unjust!" cried Victorine, and all but Edmund echoed her words. Victorine cast an appealing glance at Mrs. Worth for direction and decision. She did not wish it supposed that she was so much under the influence of Homer as to fear to act contrary to his selfish will. Her high spirit revolted at this thought. Besides, she was an impassioned admirer of the beauties of nature, and had often longed for wings that she might perch on that mountain's top; she really longed to go, and her eyes expressed this longing in their dark, resplendent depths.

"Victorine might take Edmund's seat, and Edmund ride on horseback, in company with Frank, as a general escort," suggested Mrs. Worth, and the proposition was received with acclamations. Homer looked reproachfully, even indignantly, at

his mother, and Laura whispered to Bessy that a thunder-storm had risen, and that they had better make haste.

"You are not angry with me, Homer?" said Victorine, gently laying her hand on his arm. "I would not go, indeed," added she, in a lower voice, "if it would not look so very strange for me to stay. You know it would."

"Look!" repeated he, scornfully, drawing away his arm from the soft pressure of her hand; "always thinking of what people will say. I care not what they say or think or feel. Why do you linger? They have brought Edmund's horse; they are waiting for you. You are at perfect liberty to do as you please. I was called away very opportunely, very opportunely, indeed."

"I agree with you entirely," cried she, with spirit, stung to the soul by his bitter, taunting manner. "Edmund, will you hand me to the carriage, since Homer has not the gallantry to do it? A horse on one hand and a maiden on the other make you look very much like a knight."

She said this with a smile as he led her along, but he knew that she was ill at ease, and his own cheek reddened and his heart throbbed. The carriages rolled out of the yard; Edmund's and Frank's

gay horses pranced in the rear, Estelle and Aunt Patty kept nodding to each other till a turn in the road concealed the cavalcade from view, and Homer stood with folded arms and compressed and trembling lips gazing after it.

At first Edmund rode silently and sadly by the side of Frank, and Victorine kept her face studiously turned from her companions, but it was impossible to ride silently and sadly long in such glorious sunshine, such genial air, the birds singing so joyously overhead and the landscape glowing with such life below. To ride, too, with such fine horses, whose feet kept such perfect time on the smooth, hard, beaten road! there was joy in the motion, there was joy in the mere consciousness of existence. Then the spirits of youth are so elastic, and rebound so high after a sudden pressure, it is not strange that every cloud dispersed, and that nothing was heard but merry voices and nothing seen but smiling faces.

The road grew more rough and rocky as they approached the mountain, which began with a gentle acclivity, growing gradually more and more steep, till they came to a kind of green platform, where they considered it expedient to leave their carriages and continue their journey on foot. Emma

cast an anxious glance up the precipitous path, which seemed in some places perpendicular, and thought she might possibly welcome the cave as a cold resting-place. Laura looked down on her delicate slippers, and thought it possible the sharp rocks might wound her feet. Estelle looked at her basket, and thought it might feel too heavy before she reached the top, but she could not be persuaded to leave it behind. The rest felt too much like young eagles longing to try the strength of their wings, and to fly nearer the dwelling of the sun, to be daunted by the prospect of danger, difficulty or fatigue. Bessy and Victorine, eluding the arms that would have assisted their ascent, leaped from rock to rock and swung from bough to bough in all the joy of independence. The spirits of both were more buoyant from the pressure that had been weighing them down. What if their dresses did get caught by the brambles and the sharp points of the rocks? They were not afraid of their being torn, and went laughing on. But poor Laura! she left here and there a shred of silk and a shred of lace; her shoes slipped down at the heel, her lace stockings burst into large holes, and she was ready to cry with vexation. Her only consolation was in clinging to Edmund's arm, whom she compelled to

lift her up every steep rock and over every narrow chasm. Frank laughed at her dishevelled appearance, and bade her admire the superior grace and activity of her companions, who paused sometimes in their airy journey and looked back with glowing cheeks and triumphant eyes.

"How far is it to the cave?" asked Emma, panting for breath and pale from fatigue. "I am afraid I can go no farther."

"It is but a little distance on the right hand," cried Edmund; "keep up your spirits a little longer. I think I hear the gurgling of the spring that gushes near."

"You have not leaned on me as you ought," said Mr. Selwyn. "I could have carried you as easily as I could a child."

"Oh no!" cried Emma, the colour coming back to her face; "I have taxed you too much already."

But before she had time to resist the motion she was cradled lightly on his left arm and borne along amidst the shouts of Frank and the merry laughter of her other companions. Edmund was right: the gurgling waters of the spring did murmur in their ears, and in a few moments they saw the mouth of the moss-covered cave, a natural inn kept by kind Nature herself for the refreshment of

the weary traveller. As soon as Mr. Selwyn had released the abashed but grateful Emma he went kindly back for little Estelle, who was too much of a heroine to complain, but whose short, hard breathing and scarlet cheeks showed the efforts she was making to achieve her own ascent.

"I cannot go one step farther," cried Laura, throwing herself down on a rock; "my shoes are both burst open, my stockings torn off my feet and my frock all ripped and dropping to pieces. What a horrible road! what briars and rocks! It is not fit for a Christian to travel. I'm sure I wish I never had thought of this old mountain."

"Those young heathen look very comfortable," said Mr. Selwyn, smiling, and looked toward Victorine and Bessy, who had thrown their bonnets on the ground, and leaning over the spring, scooped the cold water in the hollow of their white hands and drank it with laughing eagerness. Their plain white linen robes fell in untattered and graceful folds to the edge of the stream, and the contrast of their beautiful hair as their heads touched each other, golden brown and raven black twining and curling together, could not be more strikingly displayed.

"Wait!" cried Estelle; "I have a silver cup in

my basket which I brought on purpose to drink out of;" and lifting the mysterious lid, she proudly drew it forth, and claimed the office of cup-bearer to the rest. They all declared that the nectar of Jupiter was not half so refreshing as that cool draught of water from the silver cup, and that his blooming Hebe could not be named in the same day with theirs. They admired the symmetrical arch of the cave, the green velvet of the moss that variegated the gray of the rock, the sweet sound of the gushing spring, and wished they were hermits, that they might live there free from the cares and troubles of the world. There was a large flat rock in the centre of the cave which looked like a natural table, and broken pieces of rock scattered around which answered all the purposes of chairs. Emma was delighted with the thoughts of remaining there, and produced Ossian's poems, which she had brought on purpose to read in that congenial cave, but Laura sat gloomily on a rock, her feet gathered under the skirt of her tattered dress, declaring they should never catch her on a mountain again as long as she lived; she was afraid, too, to stay in that lonely cave, afraid of robbers, snakes and wild beasts. Mr. Selwyn offered to remain and guard the cave, but Emma would not listen to

Bessy and Victorine drinking at the spring in the moss-covered cave. "And leaning over the spring, Bessy and Victorine scooped the cold water in the hollow of their white hands, and drank it with laughing eagerness"

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this proposition, as she expected a servant every moment with the materials for a cold collation of which they were all to partake when they descended, and that servant would be a sufficient protection. She and Laura would surprise them with a "table spread in the wilderness," and they wanted no witnesses to the mystery of preparation. Estelle lingered a moment, hesitating whether to go or stay, but the pride of looking through a telescope at length decided her, and committing her basket, with a long whisper, to the care of Emma, she took Mr. Selwyn's hand and recommenced her journey in high spirits. Frank caught Bessy's arm before she could begin her bird-like flight, and she was soon obliged to acknowledge that she could not have dispensed with his aid, so steep and tangled did the path become. Edmund and Victorine were thus inevitably thrown together, though they had both endeavoured to avoid the contact. Victorine was at first painfully embarrassed from the remembrance of her last conversation with Homer, whose stern, melancholy countenance seemed bending above, reproaching her for her innocent enjoyment. But embarrassment was soon lost in excitement; sometimes, when she thought she had secured a firm footing on the rocky steps and a firm hold of

the slender boughs that shaded the wayside, her foot would slip and the bough would break, and had it not been for the arm of Edmund, she would have fallen down the natural ladder they were ascending. Sometimes they rested on a cradling branch that curved over the path, and Edmund made a fan of the leaves to cool her glowing cheeks. He could have done no less for a sister, and yet Victorine knew, if Homer should unexpectedly emerge from the thick woods that skirted the path, he would renew the accusation whose remembrance still thrilled through her heart. Perhaps, too, Edmund blamed her for coming. He alone had been silent when every other voice urged and insisted. She began to reproach herself for exposing herself to his blame, and impulsively she gave utterance to her feelings.

"I fear you think I was wrong not to yield to Homer's wishes," said she, without lifting her eyes. "You are always so ready to sacrifice your wishes to others."

"I suspect Homer himself would have regretted, upon reflection, such an unnecessary sacrifice," replied Edmund, after a slight pause. "In his cooler moments he is always just and generous."

"Ah! but his cooler moments—" "*Come so sel-*

dom," she was about to add, when she checked the expression. There was something in Edmund's countenance that forbade all conversation on this subject—something so foreign to its usual ingenuousness that it repelled and disconcerted her.

"Let us go on," said she, rising; "I am rested now, and Estelle is calling to us from Mr. Selwyn's shoulder, which she has mounted in state, and Bessy and Frank have reached the top of the ladder, and are waving their handkerchiefs in triumph."

Victorine and Edmund soon joined them, and from the stepping-stones on which they stood the road rose smoother and more inclined. The ascent was comparatively easy, the crooked path becoming straight and the rough one grassy.

"We must all take a stone in our hands before we leave this rocky ledge," cried Edmund, "to add to the pyramid on the top of the mountain. There is a complete Stonehenge there. Every traveller is obliged to carry one, and to engrave his name as a memorial of his presence."

They all selected those which had the fairest and broadest surface, and, thus laden, pressed on with eager footsteps. They could see the summit; they had promised not to look back, so that the view

might burst upon them in one full blaze of beauty, and, more honourable than Lot's wife, they did not break their pledge.

"A race!" cried Frank; "who shall have the first sight?"

He started off with the speed of a fiery colt, but dropping the stone, and pausing to pick it up, Edmund ran by and reached the goal at the same moment with Mr. Selwyn, who had always been in advance. He leaped upon the pyramidical stones and waved his hat in the air in token of victory. As he stood thus, his figure defined on the clear blue heavens, his fine hair waving from his brow, his cheeks flushed from exercise and excitement, he might have been compared to a young Apollo just lighted on the "heaven-kissing hill."

"I too have won the goal," cried Frank, giving a sudden spring, determined to surpass Edmund and reach the top of the mound at one leap. But not quite accomplishing his exploit, his feet descended on a sliding stone, which, rolling from under him, brought him rolling after it to the ground, a monument of "vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself."

"Oh, Frank, are you hurt?" exclaimed several sweet voices in a breath.

"No," cried he, springing up as suddenly as he had fallen, and shaking the dust from his coat; "I only measured myself for your amusement."

Frank had every reason to think he had accomplished his object by the peals of laughter which rang through the mountain air, in which he joined himself most heartily. But mirth was soon absorbed in silent, intense admiration. An overpowering sense of beauty and sublimity soberized and subdued their gay spirits. It seemed as if they were the only dwellers of creation, so high and lone they stood, so far and still stretched the world around them, so deep and motionless appeared its repose. The glad hum of life ascended not to them; even the smoke of the valley melted in the sunbeams before it reached their height, and the trees, though they bowed in the breeze, only presented to the eye a surface of immovable green. Everything slept below, but how strong and excellent was the wakeful principle of life in their bosoms! How pure and invigorating the mountain air that floated around them free from the exhalations of earth, uncontaminated by the breath of man and fresh as from the bowers of Eden! No sound was heard save the wind-organs of that mountain cathedral, which stole through its rocky

aisles and winding corridors, swelling as with the breath of a thousand invisible minstrels.

The mingled exclamations of "Beautiful! sublime! glorious!" succeeded the transport of mute admiration. Bessy alone continued silent. She could not express her emotions; she felt too near heaven to use the language of earth. The divine spell of poetry was upon her, and her eyes kindled with inspiration.

"Look at Bessy!" cried Frank; "she's making poetry, I know. That's the way she looks when she's inspired."

"Well, give me pencil and paper," said she, smiling, "and I will go to that shaded spot yonder, and if you will promise not to disturb me, I will try to do homage in measured verse to the lone spirit of the mountains."

"Here's pencil and paper," answered he, "but I know it is only a stratagem to be alone. Remember, if you return without the poetry, all the thunders of Olympus will reverberate round your head."

She turned away, laughing, toward the little cove that she promised should be converted into a Parnassian grove, and the lovely muse soon vanished from their sight.

"Now please let me look through the telescope," said Estelle. "Aunt Patty will get tired sitting so long at the window."

Mr. Selwyn took a cylinder from his pocket, and drawing it out to a surprising length, considering its original size, placed it in the direction of the homestead.

"This is only a pocket telescope," said he, "but it is a very powerful one, and if you look very steadily, perhaps you can see Aunt Patty take a pinch of snuff."

Estelle shut up one eye and strained the other open wider than she had ever done before, but she could only see a glimmering of sunshine through a round frame. She was ashamed, however, to acknowledge a complete failure, and said she saw something that looked like Aunt Patty, but she was not quite certain. Victorine's steadier gaze beheld, indeed, the white walls they had so recently left gleaming through the trees. She held the glass, and sought to guide Estelle's wavering glance.

"What do you see now?"

"I see Aunt Patty's profile."

"Oh no; that is a chimney you are looking at; you must give up the idea of seeing her from this

distance. But see the spires of the churches; see the dome of the academy; and look all around, how many beautiful towns are lying at our feet!"

Estelle soon became tired of shutting up one eye and straining the other to look through so narrow a compass, when nature, like a gorgeous map, was unrolled for her gaze. She became tired of standing, too, and sitting down on the pile of stones, began to think how tiresome it would be to go down the steep places they had climbed with so much difficulty. She was sorry she had not stayed with Emma and Laura in the moss-covered cave by the side of the bubbling spring. She was sorry she had left her basket behind; a piece of cake would taste so pleasant on the top of those old gray stones.

"What are you doing, Frank?" inquired Edmund, approaching him as he knelt on one knee bending over the ground.

"I am only immortalizing your names by engraving them on the rocks," replied he. "I am writing them impromptu. I have no occasion to retire to a grove to compose, like Bessy."

Edmund looked over his shoulder and read laughingly the couplets traced on the stones with the point of his penknife:

"'Here is the name of Bessy Worth,
The fairest nymph of all the earth!'

Well done for Bessy! It's a pity she hasn't a more poetical name.

'And next to her is Victorine,
A la Française, our gypsy queen.'

Why, Frank, you must be inspired as well as Bessy.

'Here is the prudent, wise Estelle,
With chickens, butter, eggs to sell.'"

"Ain't you ashamed to put that there, Frank, where it will last for ever," cried Estelle, angrily, "and where everybody can see it as long as I live?"

"Never mind, Estelle," said Edmund; "hear what he says of himself:

'The immortal name of Francis Wharton,
The greatest poet ever thought on.'"

"You made that yourself as you read, Edmund, but it is worthy to be written on everlasting tablets. Your own needs no epithet to speak its worth, and I dare not jest with the revered name of Selwyn. Let us go and peep at Bessy in her Parnassian grove, and see whether the muses are gathered around her."

Bessy had wandered from the rest, not so much to write as to think and commune with her own

glowing thoughts. The remembrance of Vivian rose painfully before her in view of such magnificent scenery—scenery which a pencil like his alone could delineate. She recalled the eloquence, the passion, of his language, the soul that flashed from his shifting glances, and sighed to think how dull and commonplace every other being seemed in comparison. "I will not dwell on recollections like these," she said to herself, sitting down upon a rock and spreading the paper upon her knee. "I will yield myself to the holy influences of Nature, who smiles so kindly on her wayward child."

The holy influences of Nature thus wooed breathed on the imagination of Bessy, and with the look of a young sibyl she began her poetical tribute to the genius of the mountain. Thus flowed the invocation:

"Beautiful mountain! like an Eastern king
Thou wear'st thy diadem of burning gold,
While the rich hues the shifting sunbeams fling
In purple royalty are round thee rolled.

"And thou art beautiful when dark-browed night
Comes with her silver chandelier to throw
A starry mantle o'er thee: oh how bright,
Through the soft gloom, its folds of glory flow!

"Most lovely thou, when, kneeling at thy feet,
Half veiled in mist, the blushing morn is seen;

When wakening gales thy regal presence greet,
And dewy flowers from their green couches lean.

"Beautiful mountain! image of the soul
Rising serene above the clouds of time,
Girdled with light, though clouds beneath it roll,
Looking to heaven, immovable, sublime.

"The sunbeams love thee, for their brightest ray
At morn and even lingers on thy brow;
The night-dews love thee! Nature's pearls, they lay,
Melting in smiles, on every forest bough.

"Beautiful mountain!—"

Bessy paused and looked upward; the warmth, the enthusiasm, of genius glowed on her face. She pushed back the tresses that clustered too thickly over her brow, and repeated aloud, "Beautiful mountain!" A soft, low sigh seemed to come like the echo of her words. She started, and the pencil dropped from her hand. Was it a dream of the imagination or a figure of flesh and blood that stood leaning against a rock not far from the spot where she was seated? One moment she gazed in wild surprise, then springing forward, forgot everything in the rapture of that sudden recognition. "Vivian!" "Bessy!" The next moment she was in the arms of Vivian, and their hearts, lately sundered, throbbing against each other as if they

were never again to separate. Perhaps, had they met thus suddenly in a house "made with hands," the formalities of life would have kept them apart, and they would have passed each other coldly and silently. But here, in the midst of the loneliness and grandeur and freedom of nature, the artificial restraints of society were forgotten, and soul answered soul as God created them to do. This celestial communion, however, was of short duration. Bessy was brought back only too soon to the hard realities of life.

"Bessy, Bessy, have you finished your poetry?" exclaimed the laughing voice of Frank, and, headed by the speaker, the whole party emerged from the shade of the rocks and shrubs, and stood rooted with astonishment at the sight of Vivian and Bessy hand in hand still as two statues carved out of the rock on which they leaned. Frank had broken the spell. Vivian drew away his hand with a sudden motion. The impassioned expression of his countenance changed, the fire of his eyes was extinguished in the coldness of pride.

"Have you dropped from the clouds, Vivian?" said Mr. Selwyn, who rejoiced at the reappearance of his young friend, and whose suspicions as to the cause of his departure were now fully confirmed.

"We have all reason to complain of your neglect, but if you will promise amendment for the future, we will try to get you absolution for the past."

"Have you been on the mountain all this time, Mr. Vivian?" asked Estelle. "Oh, I know; you have been living in the cave where Emma is now."

"I have not quite turned hermit yet," answered Vivian, with an involuntary smile, "though I acknowledge I slept last night in the cave. I have been in the neighbourhood of the mountain for several days," added he, turning to Mr. Selwyn, "where I have been detained by indisposition. I could not be resigned to leaving the country without witnessing a prospect of which I have heard so much. I was too weary to return last night, and making myself a pillow of moss, I reclined very comfortably on my bed of rock."

"Leave the country!" exclaimed Edmund. "I thought you intended to remain till Mr. Selwyn and myself made our second tour. I have been thinking, lately, of getting Mr. Selwyn to hasten our departure, or to allow me to go before him as his *avant-courier*."

"You, Edmund!" cried Bessy—"you so anxious to leave us? How unkind!" She felt that

another was unkind too, but her wounded spirit refused to give utterance to the thought.

"You too, Edmund!" echoed the heart of Victorine, but she spoke not. The idea that he was about to banish himself for Homer's sake took possession of her mind, and she wished she had never left the sunny shores of France.

"You, Edmund!" repeated Mr. Selwyn, pressing his hand with a warmth of which he was not aware. He read deeply the mysteries of the human heart, and he had lately watched him with intense anxiety. He saw that his prophecies were being fulfilled, and that, if Edmund remained, a web of inextricable misery would be woven around him. "You are right, my boy," continued he, "and you have reminded me of my duty. If you, when manhood is only in its morn, grudge a few hours of inactivity, surely I, who have reached its meridian, should hoard my moments better. I have devoted myself to the service of my country, you to mine—both, I trust, to the service of God. In a few years you will be established in professional life, I shall sigh for retirement and rest. I am grateful to my youthful monitor."

The animated approbation of Mr. Selwyn's manner, the cordial pressure of his hand, told Edmund

that his motives were understood and appreciated, and the gratitude he had before felt seemed light to that which now filled his bosom.

"Isn't it time to go back to the cave?" asked the weary, hungry Estelle. "Emma and Laura will be so tired waiting for us."

"You will come with us, Vivian?" said Edmund.

"Vivian will follow with me," cried Frank. "I wish to speak with him a few moments, if he does not refuse me the honour."

Bessy turned very pale, and looked at them both in alarm.

"I have nothing to say," added Frank, "which I am not willing the whole world should hear, yet, from motives of delicacy, I should prefer, for a few moments, his private ear."

There was a serious dignity in Frank's manner which became him well from its novelty, and even Vivian was not proof against its influence.

"I wished to speak to you," said Frank as soon as they were alone, "because I thought a few words from me might explain a very unhappy misunderstanding. We parted in anger, and I cannot deceive you by saying I like you now: that, perhaps, I shall never be able to do; but I do not want to

make you unhappy without a cause. You look upon me as a rival; I have tried to rival you, but in vain; I thought I had a prior claim to yours, but I am mistaken. I am convinced that Bessy can never be more to me than a friend. If she is willing to be more to you, I will not stand as a stumbling-block in the way to her happiness or yours."

There was a manly truthfulness in Frank's looks and manner that was perfectly irresistible.

"I must, I do, believe you," cried Vivian, grasping his hand with excessive emotion, "but they told me that you had loved each other from childhood—that you had been betrothed for years."

"Nothing but a mischievous story to sport with your credulity," cried Frank. "I think I know its source, and blush for it. I suspected at the time the cause of your flight, but I was selfish enough to be willing to profit by it. I tried to take an ungenerous advantage, and have been served as I ought. But I did not then know how deeply the affections of both were engaged. Thank Heaven, I have not discovered it too late!"

Frank was not given to heroics, but he felt a strange choking in the throat and fulness of the heart when Vivian wrung his hand, then threw his

arm over his shoulder and actually wept upon his breast.

"Do not despise me for my weakness," said he; "I can bear grief, agony and despair, and have borne them, without a tear, but joy so sudden completely unmans me. Oh, you do not know what wretchedness I have suffered, what wild, desperate plans I have formed, while flying from place to place, seeking in vain to escape from myself, and now hope, joy, ambition, are all new-born within me, created again by you—you, so generous, so disinterested! What can I say or do to prove my gratitude?"

"Nothing," replied Frank, wiping the moisture from his eyes and brow. "It is excessively warm on this mountain. I said I never should like you, but I begin to do it already. If we are not friends before long, it will be your own fault. Come, let us follow our companions, for I know Bessy's little heart is palpitating with a thousand fears."

When the young men approached arm in arm, Frank's face scarcely less irradiated than Vivian's, Bessy could scarcely repress the grateful thanksgiving that rose to her lips. Nothing had been explained to her, yet she knew that all was right, and that Vivian was restored to her once more.

"Will you accompany us now, Vivian?" said Mr. Selwyn, extending his hand with a cordial smile.

"If you will receive such an ungrateful vagrant among you," answered he, his face reddening even to his temples.

"I see no one who looks discouragingly upon you but Bessy. You had better try to propitiate her on our way to the cave, or perhaps you will be excluded from its entrance, and after fasting all night I should think you would have no objection to share the feast which I understand the good fairies are preparing for us."

While he was speaking, Mr. Selwyn took Estelle's willing hand and led the way to the downward path.

"I believe I will take compassion on you, Frank," said Victorine, laughing and blushing, "since Vivian has stolen Bessy from you. I am afraid to let you go down the mountain alone, lest you should roll to the bottom. I will assist Edmund's noble efforts," added she, to herself; "he is the guardian of his brother's happiness, and I will show him how sacred I deem the trust."

Edmund lingered behind the rest, absorbed in such deep reflections that he started with astonish-

ment when he found himself at the mouth of the cave. The tales of the Arabian genii seemed realized, for the rude cave was now transformed into a hospitable-looking dining-room, and the table of rock, first covered with a snowy cloth, was overspread with the comforts and luxuries of the homestead. Green boughs decked the corners, green leaves decorated the dishes, and Emma and Laura had garlands of green around their brows. The fairies, too, had been at work on Laura's dress, for the rips and tatters were mended so neatly that one would hardly have recognized her for the dishevelled, slatternly maiden who was left sulking there in the morning. Mr. Selwyn suspected that Emma was the presiding fairy, for she had a thimble on her finger and her work-bag lay upon a rock. Laura scarcely refrained from screaming at the sight of Vivian, who answered her embarrassed greeting with a cold and distant bow. She saw at one glance that there was a reconciliation between him and Bessy, and that her own duplicity must be discovered. Frank, too, looked coldly on her, and she imagined that every one watched her with a suspicious eye. She began to feel that the portion of the false one must be shame.

Bessy and Estelle were permitted to wait upon

the table, as Emma and Laura had prepared it. Estelle brought the water from the spring in her silver cup, and Bessy, whose heart felt as light as the cygnet's down, flitted round the board, making the cavern radiant with her smiles.

"Why do you not eat, Victorine?" said Emma. "The lady of the grotto will be angry if you slight her dainties."

"Oh, I've been eating of fairy-bower fruit and drinking of fairy-well water, and I cannot partake of grosser food," replied she.

"I am afraid Victorine will make but a poor traveller," said Mr. Selwyn; "she looks pale and wearied."

"She's thinking of the thunder-storm that waits her at home," whispered Laura to Emma, "and I suspect Edmund is too, for he looks as if he were a hundred miles off. Does your head ache, Edmund?" asked she, aloud. "I think you make as poor a traveller as Victorine."

"I am sorry if I've established such a character," replied he, "since I shall be a wayfaring man so soon."

"What do you mean, Edmund?" asked Emma. 'What pilgrimage are you meditating?"

"I am going to take him with me once more,"

said Mr. Selwyn, "and we have concluded, on the mountain's top, that we have been resting long enough for refreshment by the well-springs of social life."

Tears gathered into Emma's eyes. "What a blank we shall feel when you are gone!" said she; "we have been forgetting that life cannot always be as happy as it is now."

"Suppose you and Bessy become our fellow-travellers?" cried Mr. Selwyn; "we could have a delightful party, and so domestic it would seem like carrying the homestead away with us. I promised Bessy, two years ago, that she should breathe the inspiring air of a classic clime. I suspect her admiration for genius and the fine arts is not diminished, unless she feels an unconquerable aversion to some of their most gifted devotees."

"Oh, I'm the worst traveller in the world," cried Emma, shrinking from the idea of crossing the broad, magnificent Atlantic. "My journey to the south almost appalled me, though I have half promised Uncle Woodville to return and spend the winter months in his family."

"I think you must include me in your number of favoured ones," said Victorine. "I have been yearning lately to behold once more my transatlantic home."

"But Homer?" exclaimed Edmund, suddenly.

"Homer could fit up this cave for a dwelling-place," replied Victorine, colouring; "he would make the best hermit in the world."

"He would want a fair spirit to be his minister," said Mr. Selwyn; "then, I doubt not, the solitude of the mountain would be elysium to him."

"I want to go to Europe," exclaimed Estelle; "I want to see all the fine things Edmund has told me of. Wouldn't there be room for me in the ship? Edmund says a big ship is like a little city."

"Would you leave your mother, Estelle?"

"Couldn't we take her, too?"

"And Aunt Patty?"

"Ah! poor Aunt Patty! She couldn't take such a long journey. She's lame now, and old. She would miss me too much. No, I couldn't leave her behind."

"Verily, my child, thou art a miracle of constancy," said Mr. Selwyn, "and thou shalt have thy reward. I hope some older damsels will imitate thy fidelity, and not allow their affection to be chilled or diminished by the infirmities of nature. If there is a sight which angels and the Father of angels love, it must be that of innocent

childhood winding itself, like a blooming garland, round the faded brow and chill bosom of age."

"He means a kind rebuke to me," thought Victorine, "but he knows not half the weight that is pressing my spirits down. Oh, my soul is exceeding sorrowful, and whichever way I turn I see darkness and doubt and misery. I could bear wretchedness myself, but to be the cause of wretchedness to others is more than I can endure with resignation."

The trouble of Victorine's mind was depicted on a countenance which mirrored but too faithfully every emotion of her soul. When the signal for their departure was given, she became still more agitated. She dreaded the scene that awaited her return—the jealous strife, the withering sarcasm and the maddening accusation. She remembered the harrowing interview in the arbour, when she trembled before the might of her own roused passions, when she first felt her full powers as a woman born to love, but to resist; capable of sacrifice, death, even martyrdom, provided they were not exacted by oppression or claimed as a just tribute by an arbitrary will, but ready, also, to meet sacrifices and death and martyrdom sooner than submit a willing subject to an iron rule.

While the rest were gathering bonnet and scarf, basket and book, running to dip their cup for the last time in the gush of the fountain or pulling the moss-wreaths from the silvery-gray rocks, Victorine sat absorbed in a reverie so deep she heeded not the bustle of preparation or the sound of departing footsteps.

"Good-bye, Victorine," cried Estelle, turning back her laughing face; "you may have the fragments of the feast for supper."

"Good-bye, Victorine," said Frank; "I see you are going to remain to be the hermit's fair ministrant. We'll send him to his cell."

Victorine scarcely moved, so strong was the spell that mastered her.

"Victorine," exclaimed Edmund, in a low voice, "the shadows are beginning to lengthen."

She started quickly, and laughed at her abstraction. "I have been thinking of a name for this beautiful cave," said she; "cannot you assist me? And yet," added she as they left the spot together and followed the steps of their companions, "I had other and deeper subjects of meditation. I have been thinking of many, many things, and among others of your wish to hasten again from home. I have been so accustomed to speak impulsively to

you as a brother and a friend I cannot endure this chilling reserve existing between us. Let me, during this last opportunity that may ever offer, break down the wall of ice which circumstances have built up, and which is rising higher and higher, and address you as I could have done two years ago."

"No, no, Victorine," answered he, with a vehemence of manner so unusual that she would gladly have recalled the words that excited it; "better a thousand times be as we are, cold, reserved and apparently estranged, than attempt to renew an intimacy which would only produce the most fatal results. Would to Heaven we could be as we were two years ago!"

"Oh how difficult it is to be understood!" cried she, holding back the tears that were ready to gush from her eyes; "how difficult it is to know how to act in a situation like mine! I wanted to tell you—and I claim this act of truth as a right which no human being has the power to wrest from me—that if I am so unhappy as to drive you from the home where you are so dearly loved, if it is out of regard to your brother's jealous fears you are anxious to banish yourself, I will not allow such a sacrifice. I am resolved to depart myself, that the

dwelling of my benefactress may recover the peace and happiness I have been the means of destroying. I have a stepfather in France who has not forgotten the wild little savage he left behind. Your mother has refined that savage child. I will not make her wretched."

"Do you think Homer would suffer *you* to depart?" cried Edmund, pausing under the shade of an oak that bowed over the path. "Do you think I could suffer you to do it? My mother and sisters, would they be willing to resign you? You have spoken of my unhappy brother. We all know the malady which has followed him from the cradle to manhood, and will probably pursue him to his grave. Long before he knew or loved you I was the object of his intense jealousy, and my absence, not yours, is necessary to his tranquillity. No, Victorine, you have wrung the confession from me, and you may tremble for the consequences. It is for my sake, not yours, that I would fly—that I would build up a wall of separation between us high as the heavens and lasting as life. I cannot live near you any longer and be true to the vow that I've made my brother. True, did I say? As there's an avenging Providence, I feel that I've broken it already. Victorine, why did you force

this from me? You had robbed me of my happiness, and now you have wrested from me all I have left, my integrity."

Recoiling from the hand that clasped his arm, he leaned heavily against the trunk of the tree and covered his brow with his hands. Victorine felt as if she stood on the verge of a precipice, and that an abyss was yawning beneath her feet. On the one side she saw the stern, commanding Homer threatening her with his malediction; on the other, the pale, agitated, remorseless Edmund upbraiding her for his despair. Previously excited by the conflicts of the day, fatigued by the walk and faint from fasting, her brain was in such a fevered state that her sensations bordered on frenzy. She had no power to control them, but rushing down the path with the speed of lightning, she caught hold of Mr. Selwyn's arm, who was fortunately behind the rest, having committed Estelle to the care of Frank, and exclaimed in a strange, husky voice, "Go to Edmund! go to Edmund!"

"Good heavens!" cried he, excessively alarmed. "What is the matter? Where is he?"

"Oh, I don't know!" cried she, putting her hand to her head; "something has happened, but don't tell Homer; oh, pray don't tell him!"

"Edmund, what is the meaning of this?" cried Mr. Selwyn, for Edmund, raised from his paroxysm of remorse, had pursued in terror the flying steps of Victorine, and now stood pale as ashes before him.

"It means that I am unworthy to be trusted," answered he; "I know not what I have said, but I have uttered words that never can be forgotten. Let me go, sir; I must be alone."

"Not with such a face as that," said Mr. Selwyn, in a severe tone. "Would you carry confusion and terror to yon happy group? Would you make your mother's heart bleed by a scene of family discord? Calm yourself, impetuous boy, and let reason resume its empire. I've been dreading something like this, and yet I had such a reliance on your honour and self-control I believed that you might be put in the very furnace of temptation without having your garments scorched. You blush, Edmund, you turn away your head, and you, Victorine, you are weeping; this excitement will subside with your tears. You must both make a strong effort to subdue your emotions, or I shudder at what the consequences may be. You are both young, my children," added he, in a softened voice and affectionately taking the hand of

each, "and in youth the passions are strong; wrestle with them now, as Jacob did with the angel, in the strength of the Lord God, and you will come off conquerors; yield to them, and you will be miserable, degraded slaves through life."

"My imprudence has been the cause of all," said Victorine, whose excitement, as Mr. Selwyn had foretold, had melted away in tears. "Edmund is not to blame. I did not know what I was doing when I ran to you. How weak, how foolish, I have been!"

"Think not of the past," said Mr. Selwyn, earnestly, "but guard yourselves for the future. See! Frank is coming back to learn the cause of our delay. Remember that the eyes of many are upon you. Remember an eye more keen and watchful than all is waiting your return. Edmund, my son, I have seen your struggles and gloried in your self-conquest. One moment of human weakness does not tarnish the laurels you have won. I know now the strength of your temptations, and if resisted henceforth, my confidence, esteem and love shall be doubled instead of diminished."

"What is the matter?" said Frank, fanning himself with his hat, for it was no light exercise to toil back the steep ascent. "We are all waiting on the

platform. Are you ill, Victorine? The exertion has been too much for you."

"Yes," said Mr. Selwyn; "Victorine has been overcome by fatigue. Her fairy-food has not sustained her for the extra call upon her strength which has been made. Go, Frank, and have everything in readiness. I will take Victorine in my landau, and Vivian can occupy her seat, you know. I am a kind of common father, and if one of my children requires peculiar care, I must take him under my charge."

"How kind you are!" exclaimed Victorine, ready to fall at Mr. Selwyn's feet in her gratitude and humility. She felt overwhelmed with shame at the expressions of sympathy and anxiety uttered by her young friends, who soon gathered round her.

"I knew you would be sick," cried Estelle, "for you would not eat nor drink, and your eyes looked so heavy."

"How shockingly you look," said Laura, "your eyes are so red and your cheeks are so flushed! You must have an inflammation of the brain. You are certainly sunstruck."

Victorine rejoiced when she found herself in the carriage safe from the scrutiny of Laura and side

by side with the gentle Emma. But every motion of the carriage brought her nearer home, and unknown trials awaited her there. Just as they reached the foot of the mountain a horseman was seen galloping toward them.

"Look! there's Homer," exclaimed Estelle; "I know him by his black horse; it's all covered with foam."

"Has anything happened at home, Homer?" asked Emma, bending anxiously forward, while Victorine drew back, shrinking from the glance which she saw was still dark and lowering.

"No," replied he, turning his horse and riding by the side of the carriage, "but you were so late I came on my return to meet you. I thought some accident had occurred. You must have found some extraordinary charm in the place, to have lingered so long."

"So we did," cried Estelle, eager to tell the news; "we found Mr. Vivian. He's riding in the other carriage, and that's the reason Victorine is with us. Poor Victorine! she's tired and starved and sick."

"Is Victorine ill?" he exclaimed, with a sudden change of voice; "why didn't you tell me of this before?"

"I am not ill now, Homer," said Victorine, with so deep a colour mantling her cheeks it was impossible not to believe her words, "but I'm not quite so much an eaglet as I thought I was."

"No," interrupted Estelle; "she and Edmund stayed so far behind us all, and Mr. Selwyn had to go back for them, and then Frank went too; we were all so frightened about them. I believe Edmund is sick too; he looks as if he was."

"Estelle, you talk too much, entirely too much," said Mr. Selwyn, excessively vexed at her ill-timed prattle, which had all the effect which he feared upon her brother. He knit his brow, bit his lips, and his hands visibly trembled on the bridle-rein. "I thought I should be an intruder," he muttered; "it has all been arranged marvellously well."

The high-spirited horse champed his bits and tossed his mane, smarting from the goading spurs of his rider. With fiery eyes, dilated nostrils and foaming mouth he darted before the carriage, while Mr. Selwyn called upon Homer in a commanding voice to restrain him at the risk of his life. The horses of Mr. Selwyn, high fed and little used, caught fire from the impetuous motions of the other, and began to follow in a full gallop.

"Hush!" cried Mr. Selwyn, putting his hand

over Estelle's mouth that opened for a violent scream; "add not to the mischief you've already done by breaking all our necks. Keep still, and you are safe."

Taking the reins into his own hands, he so curbed their headlong speed that Emma and Victorine felt confident that a master-hand guided their course, and forgot their fears for themselves in anxiety for Homer. Estelle was so much mortified and wounded by Mr. Selwyn's merited rebuke that it seemed doubtful whether she would ever speak again. It must be acknowledged that Estelle was somewhat spoiled. She was the youngest child, remarkably pretty and remarkably small for her age, the petted darling of the household, and the especial idol of Aunt Patty. She had been so much accustomed to make unlimited demands on her social powers for the entertainment of the latter she forgot that every one did not lend her as delighted an ear. If she had been aware how much injury she was doing Victorine by the unguarded simplicity of her remarks, she would have wished herself dumb for life, the greatest penalty which could be inflicted upon her. She only knew that she had offended Mr. Selwyn, and she made the wise resolution of being very still

and modest till she was reinstalled in his good graces.

At length they were all safe at the homestead. Estelle's tongue burned to be the first to run in and tell her mother that Vivian was come, but she remembered that Mr. Selwyn had said that she talked entirely too much, and she suffered him to be his own herald.

Bessy could not refrain from throwing herself into her mother's arms in the fulness of her joy. "Dear mother," whispered she, "Frank has acted nobly! It is he who has made us so happy. You must be kinder to him than you have ever been before."

Much as Mrs. Worth rejoiced at the return of Vivian and the magnanimous behaviour of Frank, she saw with regret that happiness was very far removed from the bosoms of some. Homer's morning conduct was a sufficient reason for Victorine's depression, but the quickness of maternal love perceived that Edmund had a heaviness on his heart deeper than had ever weighed there before. Mr. Selwyn, too, had an anxious and troubled look, and his eye frequently rested on Edmund with an intensity of expression that was inexplicable to her. Homer did not appear; his horse stood panting in

the yard, but whither the master had gone to brood in sullen secresy over his own dark thoughts no one knew or asked. The erratic movements of the misanthrope were generally suffered to pass unnoticed.

"Why don't you tell me about all the wonders you have seen, Estelle?" asked Mrs. Worth, grieved to see that even Estelle looked sad.

"Mr. Selwyn thinks that I—I—talk too—much," stammered she, blushing, and her eyes filling with tears.

"And because I said that perhaps a little too hastily, I hope my little friend is not going to be dumb all the rest of her life?" said Mr. Selwyn, drawing her toward him with a smile of reconciliation.

"I am afraid you troubled Mr. Selwyn very much or said something very improper," said her mother, gravely.

"I only said that Victorine and Edmund stayed away off behind us, and that Mr. Selwyn had to go back for them, and Frank after him, and then Mr. Selwyn got angry, and Homer's horse began to run, and our horses began to gallop, and—and—" Estelle paused, conscious that in her vindication she was yielding to her besetting sin.

A pang such as only a mother feels when she foresees the certain misery of her children pierced the heart of Mrs. Worth; she looked at Edmund, whose changing countenance confirmed her apprehensions; she looked at Victorine, and for the first time the dread that she had been nurturing in her bosom a false being unworthy of so sacred a dwelling-place came shudderingly over her.

Frank, who had, as Bessy said, acted nobly throughout the day, regardless of himself and acutely alive to the feelings of others, began with his wonted hilarity to talk of their adventures, "their hairbreadth escapes and imminent deadly perils," not forgetting his own downfall.

"Poor Victorine," added he, "is too much of a fine lady to keep up with the wild flights of Bessy and Estelle. We were all shamefully forgetful of her, and left her in the lurch till Edmund, who is ever thoughtful for the comfort of others, took compassion on her, as she had done on me when Bessy left me for *that* Vivian," emphasizing with much vehemence the name of his rival. "She fell sick, and Mr. Selwyn went to the rescue. Now, had it not been for my sad downfall and Victorine's fine-lady airs, we should have had a glorious day—a day to be remembered in the annals of

history; a day which I am sure I shall ever remember with gratitude, for I trust I have gained a lifelong friend, and I know there's one happy heart will bless me in her prayers to-night."

"Not only to-night, but for ever," ejaculated Bessy, giving him a glance from her heavenly blue eyes that conveyed a thousand blessings.

Vivian's fine countenance became luminous with feeling. "You have indeed gained a friend," he cried, "who will ever associate you with the sweetest and brightest moments of his existence."

Frank's careless, natural narration relieved Mrs. Worth of her worst fears, and her conscience upbraided her for her transient injustice to Victorine. The current of her feelings was changed, and as it flowed more calmly on, the lovely, lovelighted face of Bessy was mirrored on the tide.

Estelle, on whose weary eyes the dews of slumber were falling fast, was warned by her mother to retire. The affectionate child lingered on the threshold for a kind word from Mr. Selwyn, whose attention at that moment was occupied by another. Waiting in vain to catch his eye, she stole behind his chair and whispered, "Pray forgive me for talking too much. I'll try not to do so any more."

Mr. Selwyn caught her in his arms and im-

printed a kiss on her fair round cheek. "You must forgive me too, my darling Estelle, for speaking so harshly and putting my hand so roughly on those sweet lips. But the happiness and the lives of many were at stake, and I was obliged to be stern, to save them. One scream, and Aunt Patty might now be mourning over her lost darling and her unfinished counterpane."

Estelle smiled through her tears, and went to bed with a lightened heart. Mr. Selwyn sought that evening an interview with Mrs. Worth. That day seemed destined to be marked in the annals of the family history. Mr. Selwyn, whose manners were remarkable for their elegant self-possession, was on this occasion visibly embarrassed, and Mrs. Worth waited in some trepidation for the communication he was about to make.

"I wished to speak with you, madam," said he, after making some general remarks, "upon our contemplated tour. It is Edmund's desire to go immediately, and whatever regret you may feel at parting with him so soon, I think your penetration must perceive the wisdom of his resolution. Should he remain longer here, I fear that his happiness must be the inevitable sacrifice."

"I dreaded as much," replied Mrs. Worth. "I

see but too well he is unhappy, and that he does not suffer alone. But must he for ever be an exile from his home? Must he be made a victim to the dark passions of others?—he who seemed born to make the sunshine of my life! And yet I tremble while he remains. If I should oppose his going, I may bring a weight of sorrow on my soul that would crush it to the dust."

She bowed her face upon her hands, and a silent prayer ascended to Heaven for fortitude to endure and strength to sustain.

"Do not shadow out too sad a futurity," said Mr. Selwyn; "I hope everything from this speedy separation. Edmund is so young, and such a well-spring of joy has till now been gushing in his soul, I cannot think of his green hopes being withered never to bloom again. Homer, if once united to Victorine, may, perhaps, find his troubled spirit lulled to rest on the bosom of wedded love."

"Homer's spirit will never find rest in this world," said the mother. "He may have here and there a gleam of happiness, but it will be like a sun-ray on the roaring billows. No; there is no such thing as rest for such a spirit as Homer's. Yet why should I limit the power of the Almighty? There is a peace which passeth all un-

derstanding which may yet dawn upon his soul. Oh that he might repose on the bosom of heavenly love!"

"And now," said Mr. Selwyn, "will you permit me to speak one moment of my own hopes and wishes? I would not be selfish, yet I have identified my happiness so closely with yours and your interesting family I cannot separate it if I would. No man living knows how to attach a higher value to the blessings of domestic life. I once had an angel wife who made this world a paradise to me. She was taken from me, and no sweet child was left to 'hang upon my neck, and look resembling her.' My home was a desert; I exchanged it for a public life, and sought in the exercise of exalted duties and in the bustle of stirring events oblivion for unutterable woe. Accident threw in my way the son of my early friend, and my widowed, childless heart yearned to adopt him as my own. I became domesticated, as it were, in the bosom of your lovely family, and all the sympathies of life have been reawakened in my bosom." He paused, and Mrs. Worth trembled for the revelation which he was about to make. She honoured and esteemed him as the friend of her husband, she loved him as the friend and benefactor of her children, but

her heart was buried in the grave of her first and only love, and she felt, if ever woman did, the truth of these thrilling words:

> "Oh what is any living love
> To that which cannot quit the dead?"

Mr. Selwyn rose and walked several times across the room without speaking, then stopped and laid his hand on the chair which supported Mrs. Worth.

"You must have anticipated," said he, in an agitated voice, "the avowal I am about to make. The manifestations of true affection cannot often elude the penetration of others. I fear you may think my hopes presumptuous, nay, even preposterous, and yet upon your decision depends the happiness of my life."

Poor Mrs. Worth! she sat with her eyes bent upon the floor, a colour on her cheek bright as the first rose of youth. This was such a sudden and unexpected trial—to give pain to the noble and generous friend of her children, perhaps deprive them of their future protector, of one who might watch over them, if she, perchance, were laid low in the dust. Yet the thought of a second marriage seemed to her constant heart as great a sacrilege

as if her husband still walked hand in hand with her, living, loving and supporting.

"I see and do not wonder at your hesitation," said he; "she is so young, and you may think that she regards me with only filial reverence. But Emma has the thoughtfulness and serenity of maturer years blended with the simplicity and tenderness of youth. Prevented, from delicacy of health, from sharing the usual amusements of her age, she has acquired a sobriety of feeling and a kind of matronly grace of manner which make me forget the disparity of age. If I have your permission to ask her to be my wife, I am willing to hazard a rejection from her."

Mrs. Worth raised her eyes with a sensation of indescribable relief. Grateful beyond measure that she had not committed herself by uttering any words expressive of her misunderstanding of his proposal, astonished at the conquest of her youthful daughter, her unpretending, heaven-devoted Emma, and flattered by such a compliment from so excellent and distinguished a man, she found it difficult to collect her thoughts so as to give him a clear and definite answer.

"She is so young," was her first remark.

"Yes, but I am old enough to guard her youth."

"Her constitution is so frail."

"I will cherish her like a tender plant in my bosom. My strength shall be the stay of her weakness. I will be father and husband in one."

"You have indeed proved a father to all my children, and if by giving you one I can partly cancel my debt of gratitude, I ought to rejoice in the opportunity. But would you still keep your station in public life? Would you think of taking her to foreign climes?"

"I see you think I am asking too much of your friendship. But the sea-born breezes will bear strength upon their wings and finish the work of restoration commenced in a southern land. If you could send her across the ocean under the charge of a good physician, you ought to do it. I will be the best physician in the world, though she looks too well now to be on the invalid list. By and by I will come and settle down in some beautiful country-seat, perhaps near your own, where we may enjoy

> 'An elegant sufficiency, content,
> Retirement, rural quiet, friendship, books,
> Progressive virtue and approving Heaven.'"

Mrs. Worth remembered how often her husband had applied this beautiful picture of domestic hap-

piness to their own wedded life, and many a proof of *recollected love* moistened her eyes with the dew of memory.

"Edmund," continued he, "shall not suffer from my present intentions. I have an ample fortune, which he still shall share. Vivian, too, requires my aiding hand. I will give him a broad stepping-stone to stand upon, and then his genius will build others, step above step, till he reaches a height of fame and fortune equal to his most lofty aspirations. Believe me, madam, a glorious destiny awaits that young man. Bessy is the child of genius herself, and their two souls meet and blend into one as naturally as two sunrays meet together as they unite. Oh, madam, I trust your children will all be happy yet. My friend will look down from heaven and rejoice over the loved ones he has left on earth."

"I have no words to express my gratitude for your all-embracing kindness," cried Mrs. Worth, "and if the love of my young and unobtrusive Emma can in any way repay a mother's debt, and if her heart answers to the wishes of yours, take her with the dowry of my blessings and my prayers."

Did Emma's heart answer to Mr. Selwyn's?

Had she been warned by premonitory symptoms of the approaching crisis? She had been pleased and honoured by his extreme kindness and attention, but she attributed it to the interest he felt in the daughter of his friend. Her modesty and simplicity and his superior age, talents and fortune had prevented her from dreaming of the possibility of such a union. The idea of any one's loving her when Bessy was near never entered her imagination. She might excite sympathy, kindness and esteem, but love was Bessy's inalienable right. She herself was destined to be an old maid, and she had resolved to make that often aspersed name so lovely from the graces of the heart and mind that no one would shrink from wearing it. With such a humble estimate of herself, it is no wonder that Emma was overwhelmed with astonishment.

Had the mountain which they had just ascended come down and knelt at her feet, she could not have experienced more amazement. But when the stunning effects of surprise were over, and she could realize that she was sought as a wife by the man whom she revered as the first of human beings, her gratitude was as deep as her humility. To be chosen as the companion of his intellectual and ennobling pursuits, the object of his chief tender-

ness and care; to have his arm of strength and soul of honour as a constant guard and support; to kneel at his side in prayer and commune with him of the mysteries of holiness; to walk hand in hand with him through life and partake with him of a blissful eternity,—surely this was happiness enough for her meek and unambitious spirit. It was not long before she came to the conclusion that, while she cherished for him all the affection of a daughter, she could learn to love him with all the tenderness of a wife.

When those sweet virgin sisters pressed their nightly couch, their hearts were too full for sleep. What a change in their life-prospects since the morning light! and what a contrast in their own! Bessy's love partook of the warmth, the enthusiasm and poetry of her nature. Her imagination beautified and glorified her love. Her heart had not waited to know whether Vivian first loved her, but she had welcomed him, as she had once told her mother, as one known and loved in a remembered world; she was sure she would have chosen him from the assembled universe as her fellow-soul, and had not circumstances thrown them together, she would have gone through life a lonely pilgrim sighing for the one being created for her. But now

that being was found. They had met—they had loved—they were to be united for ever. Bessy was too happy to sleep. Her cheek's glowing rose warmed the snows of her pillow, and her heart throbbed audibly beneath the folds of her white night-robe.

While the two lovely sisters thus lay cheek to cheek and heart to heart in their vestal couch, while the holy stars looked silently and lovingly on them through their parted curtains, and ministering angels hovered with unseen pinions round their bed, there was another who kept lonely vigils, whose sighs stole on the silence of the midnight hour, and whose pillow was saturated with tears. Victorine could not sleep. The midnight hour found her bathed in tears; the morning light flashed on her wakeful eyes and fevered brow. She arose early and endeavoured to efface with copious ablutions the traces of her tears.

"I will bathe my soul in music," said she, "and see if I can find balm in the heavenly ablution." She sought the piano and began a morning hymn of praise which Mrs. Worth loved to hear. "His mother's wakening ear will hear, and perhaps bless the sounds."

Did she mean Homer or Edmund's mother?

Sweet and solemn her voice rose, and sad, too, though it was a hymn of adoration and praise:

"Lord, in the morning thou shalt hear
My voice ascending high;
To thee will I address my prayer,
To thee lift up mine eye."

"Victorine!" uttered a deep-toned voice. It was the voice of Homer, and she knew that a scene of passion and strife awaited her.

"Is your soul tuned to harmony this morning, Homer?" asked she, looking up with a smile. It was a forced one, and vanished when her eye met his.

"You meet me in mockery, Victorine," said he, "but there is not one chord in my spirit that can respond to music or mirth. I should think your conduct of yesterday might produce by this time some serious reflections."

"What conduct? If you mean my going unaccompanied by yourself, reflection only confirms me in the propriety of the step. You do not, cannot, blame me now, Homer, for doing what every other person in the world would have done in my situation — what any other person but yourself would have wished me to have done. You do blame me still. I have done you more than justice.

I thought you selfish from passion. I find you so from principle."

"Ever ready to justify yourself, Victorine—ever ready to throw censure on me. I was not about to allude, at this moment, to the circumstances of your choosing a party of pleasure in preference to showing by a trifling sacrifice your regard to my happiness. I could have forgiven that; I did, so far as to ride forth to meet you, weary as I was, resolved to greet you in the spirit of reconciliation. But you drew coldly back as I approached, as if something evil were crossing your path. No wonder you drew back in conscious guilt, when you knew how you had spent the hours since we parted. How glaring must have been your conduct, since even childhood made it a matter of animadversion! What did my innocent sister say? Good heavens! how calmly I am speaking, when her every word is blistered on my brain!"

"I'm weary—oh, so weary, of this strife," cried Victorine, clasping her hands passionately together, "that I am tempted to make a solemn vow that this shall be the last time we shall ever meet. Yet once again, in pity to your misery, I will explain those blistering words. Knowing your unhappy

suspicions, Edmund and myself mutually avoided each other. In coming down the mountain I even solicited the arm of Frank, because my heart told me you would thank me for the choice. Before we left the cave I became so absorbed in sad meditations, caused alone by you, that I knew not when my companions left me. Edmund was the last, and because he was not cruel enough to suffer me to come down those rough rocks unsupported and alone, you upbraid me as a criminal guilty of some ignominious deed. Oh, Homer, you are not worthy of such a noble, generous brother. You do not know the heart you believe capable of such injury to you."

"Every word you have uttered," continued he, with increasing vehemence, "has only added tenfold weight to my suspicions. I did not ask for an explanation; I knew there was none to be given. Do not add duplicity to your already broken faith. Do not go on coolly and deliberately playing with my credulity and mocking me with protestations of regard. The torture inflicted in ancient days of suffering water to fall drop by drop till it perforated the living brain and bared the secret place of thought could not have been compared to this. Victorine, why do you attempt to

deceive me in this manner? You do not love me; you never have loved me."

"I have loved you, Homer," cried she, with more sorrow than anger in her voice and manner—"I have loved you as you never will be loved again. Hear me calmly for one moment, and then I am willing to be silent for ever. When I first discovered the influence I had gained over your heart, my pride exulted in the thought that the eye that looked so coldly and darkly on all the world softened at the beams of mine, that the bosom shut to every sweet affection opened involuntarily to embrace my image. Then tender feeling dawned, and my eyes, which had hitherto glanced sportively on all around, learned to soften at the beams of *yours*. My heart unfolded to receive *your* image and enshrine it as a sacred trust. The gloom of your character, at which I once flung the random shafts of ridicule, assumed a grandeur in my sight, since I found it resulted from a depth of feeling which no common mind could fathom. Yes, Homer," continued Victorine, with indescribable grace and dignity, her language rising into that metaphorical strain in which strong passion unconsciously indulges, "I looked upon you as one of those ruins round which genius and feeling love to

linger, where the moonlight shines lovelier from the very darkness of the shadows and the ivy blooms brighter from the dampness of its broken walls. But since I find you capable of the most degrading suspicions and cruel injustice, since I see you persisting in a course of conduct as debasing to yourself as it is harrowing to me, destroying the peace of your brother and wearing out my existence with your causeless, unnatural jealousy, setting aside manliness and reason and truth,—I tell thee, Homer, and I tell thee calmly, I would as soon take the lightning's chain and bind it round my breast for warmth as trust for happiness in such love as you can offer me."

"Then you reject me for ever!" cried he, his quivering lips turning as pale as clay.

At this moment, which might be the crisis of his fate, the door was opened and Edmund stood before them. He was not aware of the interview on which he was intruding, and as soon as he discovered in whose presence he was he turned to leave the apartment.

"Stay," cried Homer, his blood boiling in his veins from the fire of his passion—"stay, brother that was, traitor that is. The time is come when we must understand each other. Where is the vow

you made before the God of heaven that you would never be my rival in fame, fortune or love? Fame—I care not for its breath; fortune—you have already secured; and love—all that I treasured, all that I lived for, you have stolen from me, basely, insidiously, like the midnight robber who wraps himself in darkness as a thick veil. Look me in the face, if you dare, and tell me that your vow is not broken."

"Broken in spirit, but not in deed," cried Edmund, recoiling from the frenzied glance of Homer. "I told you that I was human, that I had strong passions, and that it was only in the strength of God that I wrestled with them. I have never attempted to rival you. Victorine knows that I have not. I have treated her as the stranger within our gates, not the friend of my childhood. I have done what I can do no more. I cannot stay. The world henceforth shall be my home. I leave everything to you—mother, sisters, Victorine and home. I am willing my very name should be blotted from remembrance, provided such oblivion could purchase tranquillity for you."

"No, no, Edmund," cried Victorine; "leave me not to him. My decision is made. I shall return to my native clime and bury in the walls of a con-

vent every youthful hope. Homer, if you had fifty thousand brothers, and banished them all for my sake, it would be in vain; I never could be your wife."

Edmund gazed upon Victorine as slowly and sadly but firmly she uttered these emphatic words. They were not the breathings of passion, but the expression of an unalterable will. Her eyes, in conclusion, were lifted toward heaven, her hands were clasped tightly over her breast. The idea that she was free, that, though lost to him, he was not doomed to love her as the wife of his brother, filled him with a momentary joy too strong to be repressed. The emotions which he had so long struggled to subdue rushed for one instant unchecked through his veins, burned on his cheek and flashed from his eyes. Homer marked this sudden bursting of light and flame, and he marked, too, a sudden simultaneous illumination of Victorine's late pale and passionless face. A blindness came over his eyes, a cold, clammy sweat covered his brow. He felt as if he had burning coals eating into his naked heart, as if all life and warmth had concentrated in that one spot in a consuming blaze, and that Edmund had kindled it from the fires of hell.

"If never mine, not Edmund's!" exclaimed he,

rushing toward Edmund with the fury of a madman. Victorine threw herself on his arm with a cry so wild and piercing that it penetrated to the remotest chamber of the homestead, but it was too late. The blow descended, and Edmund, thrown violently against the marble corner of the mantelpiece, lay prostrate beneath his brother's fratricidal hand.

What a scene met the gaze of those who, roused by that wild cry of agony, ran in terror to the spot! Stretched on the floor, still and white as a corpse, was the lifeless body of Edmund, his head resting on the marble slabs of the hearth, which were splashed with the blood-drops that gushed from his temples. And reclining over him, as white and almost as lifeless, lay Victorine, her long hair sweeping over his breast and dabbling in his blood, and her arms clasping him in a stiffening fold. Standing over this death-like pair, still, dark and terrible as Cain over the body of his martyred brother, still as if transformed to stone by some avenging power, towered the stately form of Homer.

It were a vain attempt to describe the anguish and horror that filled the household. Sorrow had once before visited that mansion, a sudden, fearful messenger, but it was a commissioned angel from

on high, and the most rebellious will soon learn to bow to the mandate of God. But man had wrought this deed—a son, a brother. Strange that that fond mother's heart did not break at once! Strange that those loving, gentle sisters could gaze on such a sight and live! But it is astonishing what a weight of woe the human heart can bear without being crushed. The first distinct sounds which were heard amidst shrieks and incoherent cries were uttered by Mr. Selwyn, who alone retained sufficient self-possession to think and to act. "Bathe her temples, give her water and air," cried he, lifting Victorine from the bosom of Edmund and bearing her to a sofa; then without waiting to see who obeyed his command, he knelt down by his adopted son, raised his bleeding head on his arm and laid his hand beneath the folds of his vest. "Great God!" he ejaculated, "there is life—a faint pulsation in his heart. Haste for the physician, quick! Bring bandages, lint, anything to stop this blood from flowing. Water! for God's sake give me water, or he dies."

The moment Mr. Selwyn exclaimed, "Great God! there is life," Homer burst into a loud, convulsive laugh, then fell back into the arms of Frank and Vivian, who both sprang forward to receive him.

"Homer rushed towards Edmund with the fury of a madman. The blow descended, and Edmund, thrown violently against the marble corner of the mantle-piece, lay prostrate beneath his brother's fratricidal hand, with Victorine, white and almost lifeless, reclining over him."—*Page* 289.

They bore him from the apartment, but even after the door was closed the echo of that same convulsive laugh was heard again and again, more terrible a thousand times than the wailings of grief.

Edmund indeed lived, but the violence of the blow and fall had produced a concussion of the brain, and his life was suspended on so slender a hope it was scarcely felt in the iron grasp of despair which had hold of their hearts.

The sun went down that night on a house of grief, but all was still as death save the chamber where Homer lay tossing in delirious agony, now tearing the bandages from his arms, where the veins had been opened to give vent to the hot, feverish blood, and now calling for water to quench the fire in his heart and his brain. Victorine had fallen from one fainting fit into another, till at length she sunk into a stupor so deep it might have been taken for the slumber of the grave. The sisters, prohibited the chamber of their brothers, sat by the couch of Victorine, holding her pallid hands and bathing them with their tears. Sometimes the sound of a softly-opening door, a cautious tread on the stairs, made their pulses stop and their blood curdle. It might be the messenger of death approaching, and they feared to look into each

other's face. Sometimes, too, the ravings of Homer came like the fitful moanings of an autumn wind on the hush of the midnight hour. Only the night before they had lain in each other's arms, too full of blissful hopes to slumber, and now the same stars that smiled so benignantly upon them seemed to look down with pale, mournful lustre on their sad vigils.

All night the mother leaned over the bed of Edmund, watching his death-white face and counting the beatings of his feeble pulse. Good Doctor Leyton, the old family physician, whom they all loved next to their minister, never left them, but went from room to room administering comfort, if not relief. Mr. Selwyn's principal station was by the side of Homer, but he often stole in to gaze on the marble features of Edmund, and to whisper in the mother's ear tidings of the unhappy Homer. And whose are those venerable forms seated side by side in the gloom of that silent, shaded room? How came they there, those old, trembling, silver-haired ones, to share the night-watch which they cannot relieve? How awful is their appearance there in the midst of the stillness and grief!—a link between the past and the present, the living and the dead!

The aged dwellers of the little cottage had tottered over as soon as the tidings had reached their ears, and they would not be constrained to depart until morning. Of all the family of their benefactress none was so beloved as Edmund, and the old ladies wept and prayed God that he might live, even if he should require their lives in his stead. Softly the octogenarian murmured the language of Scripture with which her memory was stored, and it stole on the ear like the voice of prophecy, so solemn and slow were the accents. It was well poor old Aunt Patty could not leave her apartment, for she, too, would have claimed a place by the pillow of Edmund, and age has an authority which was never disputed in the family of Mrs. Worth. Estelle was forbidden to quit her, and the child found consolation in pouring out her sorrows in Aunt Patty's sympathizing ear.

Day passed after day, and still the muffled knocker and the darkened window and the mournful countenances showed that the fear of death hung over the house. It was true, Victorine had risen, and was seen hovering like a pale ghost round the bed of Edmund, but Edmund still lay with closed eyes and speechless lips, and Homer, though his ravings had subsided, languished under a burning

fever brought on by the fierceness and violence of passion.

The third night, as the mother hung over her second-born, the long-sealed lids slowly unclosed, and the soul, awakened from its trance, looked feebly forth from the dim eyes. She did not speak, but laid her hand gently on his brow. A dewy moisture met her touch, and the pale lips parted with a perceptible motion. Again the eyes closed, and the faint regular breathings of slumber stole on her ear. On her knees she watched that slumber, and Victorine knelt at her side, for they knew that sleep was the crisis of his fate; it would either bear him softly over the billows of death or bring healing on its downy wings.

"Mother," murmured a faint voice, and Mrs. Worth knew that God had given her son back to her arms; "Victorine." The mother and the Victorine thus faintly addressed attempted not to answer, but, on their knees as they were, they fell on each other's neck and wept and sobbed as if Edmund had just breathed his last. "My brother?" again sighed Edmund; "my unhappy brother?"

"He lives, my son," said Mrs. Worth, laying her hand on Edmund's pallid lips; "but speak not, move not. O my God, I thank thee!"

She felt the faint pressure of those pallid lips on her hand, and his eyes, raised to heaven, seemed to echo the grateful ejaculation, "O my God, I thank thee!"

And now Edmund's only danger was in being killed by too much kindness by his tender nurses. But had they forsaken Homer? Did no mother or sister tend his feverish couch and minister to his disease? Ah! when did a mother ever forget her first-born?—at least such a mother as Homer's? When did passion ever estrange or crime alienate the mother from her son, the child of her prayers, her hopes and her tears? During his wild paroxysms he would allow no one to be near him but Mr. Selwyn, Frank and Vivian, who kept watch by him day and night, and it often required their united strength to master him in his struggles, but when the fever left him, he was weak as an infant, and as easily subdued. Though his delirious madness was over, his mind still wandered, and the doctor began to fear a permanent alienation of the intellect, though he did not express his apprehensions, for he did not wish to add to the already too great suffering.

Once, as Mrs. Worth sat by Homer, she noticed a sudden change in his countenance. He gazed long

and mournfully on her, and then said in a low voice, "Have you not cursed me?"

"Curse my son?" she cried. "Oh, Homer, I have wept over you and prayed over you when you knew me not, and now, Homer—yes, even now, my first-born—a mother's blessing may be yours, if you will not cast it from you. Your brother lives, and forgives you as freely as he hopes to be forgiven by his God."

"My brother forgives me!" repeated he, in indescribable emotion, "and you, have you one blessing left for me, even for me, O my mother? —me, the second Cain?"

He drew the covering over his face, and the bed shook with the throes of his agony. Gently and soothingly she bent over and whispered in his ear words of heavenly consolation. She told him of the prodigal who, returning in shame and remorse to his father's mansion, was welcomed with the embraces of love; of the abounding joy in heaven over the repenting sinner; of the promise given to the broken and contrite heart that the high and holy One which inhabiteth eternity should descend and make his dwelling there. Holy were the lessons taught on that bed of sickness. The stubborn glebe of the sinner's heart was broken by the

ploughshare of the Almighty, and, watered by penitential showers, it might yet yield a harvest of golden fruit.

At length the brothers met once more. Homer, weak and languid, reclined upon a sofa supported by the arm of his mother. Edmund, whose recovery had been more rapid, came in leaning on Mr. Selwyn, who fain would have retarded the interview. But Edmund yearned to pour the balm of forgiveness into the goaded bosom of Homer, and the first effort of returning strength led him to his side. Homer's head was pillowed on his mother's shoulder. His raven hair hung damp and thick over his pale brow, shading his sunken eyes. His features were in deep repose, the workings of passion having settled down into an expression of profound melancholy. But though the strife seemed over and the battle won, the scars of a wounded spirit were imprinted on his face. The lightning leaves its scathing mark, fire, flood and storm their blasting traces, but the lightning and storm of passion leave deeper and more blasting traces on the soul. Edmund, pale and agitated, approached his brother, and the next moment they were weeping in each other's arms, while the arms of a mother enfolded them both.

Mr. Selwyn withdrew. He felt it was a scene which should be sacred from all intrusion—that even the eye of friendship should not invade its hallowed bounds.

"How much you have suffered, my brother!" exclaimed Edmund, gazing with anguish on Homer's altered features; "but God has been merciful to us both. Let us commence anew a life of gratitude and love."

"If I could die this moment," cried Homer, "I should be happy—happy in the consciousness of your forgiveness and hoping in the mercy of God. But I dread to return to the world. I dread the resurrection of my bosom enemy."

"No; it will never rise again," said Edmund; "I renounce the fatal passion which has destroyed our peace. Had I been true in spirit to the vow I made, this evil never had befallen us. We have both been tempted, and both have sinned."

"Hear me, Edmund," cried Homer, raising his head and lifting his joined hands to heaven, "while I declare, as in the presence of omnipotent Truth, that the thought of Victorine shall never again come betwixt thee and me. She has renounced me, and I here resign all claim upon her affections or her faith. I absolve you from a promise made

to a madman. As a rational being I have no right to exact it. Be happy with each other, and let no remembrance of me darken your felicity. If I live, I will gather up the energies of my soul and labour henceforth for immortality. No, not for immortality, but eternity. But something tells me here," added he, pressing his hand heavily on his breast, "that I am destined to an early grave. The flame of life has been burning too intensely to last. My youth is consumed like the grass of the field when the breath of fire passeth over it. Weep not, my mother, my long-suffering, blessed mother. The sleep of the grave will be sweet to me. No storm of passion will disturb that long repose. No scorching jealousy be felt in that cold bed. All will be peace there, my brother."

Edmund pressed his hand, incapable of utterance. The love he felt for Victorine seemed a faint emotion compared to what he experienced at this moment for Homer. He would willingly purchase his brother's life at the sacrifice of his own. He would never erect his happiness on the ruins of his brother's. He would emulate his generosity.

The brothers moved again in the family circle, but Homer was the shadow of his former self. His

lofty figure drooped; the lustre of his lamp-bright eyes waxed dim. The haughty spirit which once sat enthroned in those brilliant eyes was become gentle as a weaned child, and could be led by a silken thread. His mother watched him with heartbreaking tenderness. Of all her children he had called forth the greatest intensity of feeling. She had loved him with fear and trembling. The fear that he would forfeit the affection of all others only bound him closer to her heart. Whatever he had been to the rest of the world, he had always been gentle and affectionate to her. And now, when he was gentle and affectionate to all, and household love followed his steps and hung upon his looks with ever-increasing devotion, when the lost link in the family chain was restored in golden lustre, must the chain be broken by death? Must the prodigal so lately received into the bosom of an earthly home be called so soon to his Father's mansions in the skies? "Even so, Father," replied the Christian parent, "if it seemeth good in thy sight. The cup which thou givest me, shall I not drain it, even to the bitterest dregs of sorrow? One loved one is gone before me—another is treading the shadowy path. The way through the dark valley is beaten, and when I travel through it, it

will be sweet to know that I am treading in the steps of my husband and my son."

As her fears strengthened, so did the hopes of others. They saw his eye become brighter, and a bright flush on his cheek came and went like a herald of returning health. "He is better," they would say, "oh how much better! He will soon be well, and we shall be happy together once more."

Edmund and Victorine never talked of happiness. The thought could not be associated with Homer, and consequently was rejected by them.

One evening Mrs. Worth was summoned to the dying bed of old Lady Graves, who had never been well since the night she sat by Edmund, believing the angel of death had come to bear him away. The shock was too much for her aged frame, and she was about to be gathered to her fathers. She wanted to see the children of her benefactress, "her princely boy" most of all, he whose danger had hastened her to the tomb.

"I am going" said the aged Christian, holding out her cold, trembling hand—"I am going the way of all the earth. My soul rejoices to lay down the burden of nearly a hundred years. The Lord has been exceedingly gracious unto me," continued she,

gazing dimly up in the fair, sad faces that bent over the couch, "and sent you all to comfort the poor and the needy, to uphold the aged and infirm, to be lamps to my feet and guides to my path. Come nearer and let me lay my hand in blessing on you before I go hence and am no more seen for ever." Solemnly the dying saint laid her palsied hand on each head bowed in reverence before her. It lingered a moment on Bessy's, and her fingers slowly threaded the labyrinth of her golden tresses. "Are these the strings of the golden harp of the cherubims?" she murmured, her senses wandering; "they are all stirring with music. I stand upon a sea of glass, and I shall sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, O thou King of saints!"

Her eyes closed, and she lay so still they thought her spirit had passed, when, suddenly opening them, she spoke with a stronger voice, and a spark gleamed in her eyes from life's decaying embers.

"I have had a dream," she cried, gazing fixedly at Mrs. Worth. "The angel of the Lord came down to me and told me he had a message for you. I am going to have company in the grave to-night. The aged and the young shall lie side by side, and

rise together in the resurrection morn. The Master will come and knock at your door. The young man will rise at the call. Keep him not back, for the Master is waiting. He's waiting for him and for me."

As Mrs. Worth and her children listened to the prophetic voice which pronounced the doom of death on their house, a cold chill ran through their veins. It was true her mind had been dwelling lately on the dark scenes which had transpired at the homestead, and it was natural their remembrance should blend with her dying dreams.

Bessy, whose early faith in dreams had left a shade of superstition on her imagination, clung pale and tearful to the arm of Edmund and entreated him to return, and Mrs. Worth impulsively sought to release her hand from the cold fingers that closed round it. But reason soon mastered impulse, and she would not forsake the dying for the terrors of a feverish dream.

"What will become of my poor daughter," said the old lady, the throb of nature wakening in her heart, "alone, alone—all alone in the world? Poor Eunice! but the Lord will take care of her. I have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor their seed begging their bread."

"I will take care of her," said Mrs. Worth. "I will take her home and make her last days comfortable."

"Bless you, bless you!" murmured the aged mother; "Eunice will soon come to me. Turn the hour-glass; the sand is all run out." The last sand of life glided away with these words; the weary pilgrim was at rest.

Mrs. Worth closed the sunken eyes, smoothed the white locks over the placid brow and saw the stillness of everlasting rest gradually steal over every care-worn feature. "Rest to thee, weary pilgrim," mused her saddened soul; "thy goal is won. Thou hast dropped thy staff of age for the strength of immortal youth. Thou hast exchanged thy lowly cabin for a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Death had no terrors for thee, aged Christian; thou hast long waited for him with a smile, and chided his long delay. But when he comes to the young— Ah me! that awful dream!" Again a cold shudder ran through her veins. It was nothing but a dream, the last strong impression of life reflected from a broken mirror, yet there was something in her great age associated with the solemnities of a dying hour that invested her words with the grandeur of prophecy,

and the visions of the expiring saint have sometimes been strangely realized. Might not the light of futurity gleam through the loopholes of life's ruined walls, and the shadows of earth as well as the glories of heaven break in on the soul?

While this solemn scene was passing in the cottage, Homer was reclining languidly on a sofa listening to the strains which had always a soothing influence over him, even in his darkest hours. He had expressed a wish for music, and Victorine sang some of the songs he used to love. She remained while the others attended the bed of the dying. She shrunk from the sight of death, and she was engaged in a duty to the living, sweet, though mournful to her soul. She could not refuse a request of Homer's, gentle and unexacting as he now was, and her voice, catching the keynote from her feelings, made such thrilling melody that the eyes of the invalid glistened with emotion. The lamp was removed into the shadow of the chimney, so that the rays of the moon, which streamed through the casement, were seen in their full lustre; they reflected the window-sashes and the softly-waving trees on the carpet, partially illuminated the figure of Victorine and encircled with a halo of silvery

glory the reclining brow of Homer. The soft stillness of the moonlit hour, the melancholy sweetness of the minstrelsy, the deep tranquillity of nature, all harmonized, and there was music in the beating of the hearts which kept time with the vesper hymn.

"Let me die listening to a strain like that," said Homer, in a low voice, as Victorine paused and leaned silently over the instrument. "Music is to me the breath of the Deity. It flows into my soul and diffuses a divine glow and warmth that I cannot express. It creates an unutterable longing for celestial communion. It comes with tidings from the invisible world, and goes with the sighs of earth for the intercourse of angels." He looked steadfastly at the moon, slowly, serenely gliding on her cerulean sea, then turned to Victorine with a deep sigh: "What a contrast to this peaceful scene has been my short and troubled life! But now my soul is in harmony with the calm spirit of the universe. I cannot describe the joy there is in this hush of the passions after a day of tempests, this subsiding of the stormy billows. Oh, Victorine, when I think of the anguish I have caused you and all I love, how I have perverted the gifts of God and turned his richest blessings into curses, I am

ready to exclaim, 'It is better that I die than live.' And still that ejaculation is mine; now that the bitterness of remorse is past, and the consciousness of forgiveness from God and man has healed the wounds of a guilty conscience, I still exclaim, 'It is better that I die than live.' You would never be happy with Edmund while you feared that your happiness might be my misery. You would both sacrifice yourselves for me. But the blossoms of your love may bloom sweetly on my grave, and the tear that perchance may fall to my memory will not mar their brightness."

"Do not talk thus," said the weeping Victorine, sitting down by his side and taking his hand in hers. "Oh, Homer, what a chill hand is this! The night-air is too cold for you."

"No; I do not feel chilled. Do not move. Let me sit thus. Perhaps it is the last time I shall ever clasp your hand in mine and gaze upon the face I have loved with too fond idolatry. I have resigned you, Victorine, resigned all earthly things, but at this moment I feel a yearning desire to recall the love which once warmed my life, its remembrance comes to me so like a dream of heaven. You once loved me, Victorine?"

"I love you still," cried she, faintly, and bowing

her head on his shoulder. "I have had a divided heart. When the dark spell was on you, I was alienated from you, and Edmund rivaled you in my affections. But now I feel a tide of tenderness rushing over me that almost drowns my spirit. Everything is forgotten but the love you have borne me, and the sufferings which have expiated every wrong."

"This is indeed an earnest of heaven, a bliss I dreamed not of tasting on earth," he uttered, passing one arm gently round her and pressing his cheek on her silken tresses. Victorine's head drooped lower and lower, till her tears rained on his breast. A soft, fleeting cloud floated over the face of the moon, and the night gale sighed through the lattice. Nature sympathized with love and sorrow, and wrapped them in her shadow as with a veil.

Gradually the arm which clasped Victorine relaxed its hold, and she felt a quick shudder run through the bosom on which her cheek was pillowed. She raised her head, and the cloud rolling back from the moon, she saw that his face was deadly pale. "Speak, Homer," cried she; "you are ill—you are faint. Merciful heavens! he cannot speak!—Vivian—Frank—haste—haste—he dies!"

The young men, who were lingering in the piazza watching for the sisters' return, heard the agonized call of Victorine, and rushed to her assistance.

"It is only a fainting fit," cried Frank, trying to speak with composure; "he will soon revive." He loosened his vest and bathed his temples with the water which Vivian brought. Victorine knelt by him and chafed his chill hands in hers, calling upon him in the most impassioned manner to speak and tell her that he lived.

"I live," he murmured; "I shall live for ever."

His mother and Bessy, who had hastened on in advance of the rest, now entered the room, and beheld what they believed the fulfillment of the prophetic dream.

"O my God!" cried Bessy, clinging to her mother. "The Master is come! I hear him knocking at the door!"

Mrs. Worth bent calmly over her son and laid her cheek to his. A supernatural strength girded her heart; she felt ready to travel with him through the "valley of the shadow of death," and she feared no evil.

"How is it with thee, my son? Did the summons find thee ready?"

"All is peace here, my mother," said he, laying his hand on his heart, and his face looked to her as the face of an angel, so unearthly was its expression in that pale, silvery light.

Doctor Leyton, who had been immediately summoned, said a blood-vessel in the heart had been suddenly ruptured, and that the skill of man availed nothing in such a case.

"Move me not," said the dying youth as they attempted to bear him to a couch. "Let me lie here in this blessed light. Let it gild the shadows of death. Edmund, I see thee not."

"I am here, my brother," cried he, kneeling by the side of Victorine, "but oh, Homer, I cannot be parted from thee."

"The living must part, but the dead will meet," was the low, solemn response. "Hinder me not," continued he, in a fainter tone; "my Saviour chides my delay. Behold, he stands at the door and knocks. His head is wet with dew, and his locks are heavy with the drops of night."

He lay silent for a few moments, breathing with difficulty and pain, on the bosom of his mother. Pale but tearless, she supported him in her arms, wiping the death-damps from his brow and pressing her lips on its marble surface. "The arms of

a mother enfold thee, my first-born," murmured she, "and would bear thee safely over the gulf of death. But the arms of a Saviour are kinder than mine, and to him, in faith, I yield thee. I am laying up my treasures in heaven; by and by I shall seek them there."

Her voice ceased, though her lips continued to move, and nothing was heard but the sobbings of grief, save the breathing which became shorter and shorter. A slight convulsion passed over the features of the dying youth. "Victorine," cried he, wildly, "why hast thou left me? You promised in death to be mine."

These were the last words that ever passed the lips of Homer. His head sunk heavily on the maternal bosom. The victim of misguided passion was no more.

Calm be thy rest, thou tempest-tost and weary! Thou hast said that the sleep of the grave would be sweet. The grassy covering that will wrap thy clay shall be kept green by the tears of affection, and thy errors be remembered only to forgive.

"For oh how softly do the tints return
Of every virtue sleeping in the urn!
Frailties are buried there, or, if they live,
Remembrance only wakes them to forgive."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

THE pale leaves of autumn strewed the grave of Homer, the snows of winter covered it as with a shroud and the flowers of spring began to shed their bloom and sweetness there. Time had softened the bitterness of grief, and hope and love once more sprang up in the hearts of the young dwellers of the homestead. It was hope, however, chastened by experience, and love made holier by past sorrow. Edmund, who was now "the only son of his mother," refused to leave her for more brilliant prospects in a foreign land. "My father and elder brother are gone," said he; "a sacred duty devolves on me, and may God only bless me as I prove worthy of the trust!"

Mr. Selwyn did not attempt to shake this filial resolution, but his own duties were pressing, and he was obliged to hasten his departure, already too long deferred. But though he consented to leave his adopted son, he was not to depart alone. He was

to bear a young bride from the homestead, and Bessy, too, as the bride of Vivian, was to accompany him whom, having revered so long as a second father, she thought it almost impossible she could ever address by the more familiar name of brother.

The last scenes described in this family history have been of a dark and gloomy character. We now gladly turn to one where sunshine again illumines the landscape of life. We have taken them as Aunt Patty did the pieces from her *scrap-bag*, a shred of black and of white, or of variegated dyes, the relic of a wedding dress or a shroud, just as it happened, for as Aunt Patty herself remarked: "Life is nothing but a large piece of patchwork. Though the separate parts may be ever so different, put them all together and they make a beautiful whole. For they are all fixed by the hand of the Almighty, and his works are all ordered aright."

The double wedding was as unostentatious as possible, for the family did not wish to blend bridal festivities with the weeds of mourning. The sisters exchanged their sable dresses for robes of virgin white, but they wore no other decoration. They needed none; they were clothed in the beauty of innocence and youth and love.

Vivian would have thought his happiness incomplete unless shared by his generous and warm-hearted friend, Frank Wharton. But Bessy could not regret the absence of the treacherous Laura, though she lamented the rashness and folly which had lately made her an alien from her maternal home. Laura, vain and unprincipled, had long looked with envy on the lovely sisters, whom she tried to believe inferior to herself, and whose prosperity tinctured with wormwood bitterness the blessings bestowed on herself. Resolved to take precedence of them in marriage, and foolishly hoping to mortify them by the act, she eloped with a showy adventurer whose addresses her mother had forbidden her to accept—a heartless libertine, a reckless gambler whose wages of sin were squandered as soon as they were won. Laura's hour for reflection came too late for her happiness, but not, we trust, for her reformation.

Aunt Patty, who had not left her little chamber for more than two years, was carried down stairs to witness the ceremony, and old Lady Paine, who was now an inmate of the family, laid aside her distaff and wheel and sat in the family circle. The only ornaments of the room added for the oc-

casion were garlands of flowers which Estelle and Frank had woven, and the picture of Bessy which looked down from the walls like the guardian angel of the household. But fair as the picture was, Bessy was still fairer, and Frank, though he had magnanimously given her to his rival and endeavored to stifle every warmer feeling than brotherly regard, could not help wishing *that* Vivian had never risen, a radiant star, on the horizon of her young imagination, and extinguished so completely his lesser light. His eye turned from Bessy to the pensive and dark-haired Victorine, whose once resplendent countenance was now softened by an expression of melancholy and resignation exceedingly touching in one so young and beautiful. He thought of the buried Homer in his sad and lonely grave, and a cloud passed over his sunny face. The memory of the dead comes with double solemnity in the hour of bridal joy.

Let us hear what Aunt Patty says of the wedding to her neighbour old Lady Payne, forgetting that she cannot hear the low, confidential tone she thinks it proper to assume:

"It does not seem more than a year or so since my niece Emma, Mrs. Worth that is, stood up to be married, and Parson Broomfield said that they

were the handsomest couple that he ever joined together. And now her two daughters are old enough to be brides themselves, beautiful creatures like their mother. Bessy, I must say, is even handsomer than her mother was, but she don't look as if she was made of the same flesh and blood as other folks. I never saw anybody that did look just like her. I think, now she's big enough to be married, she might perhaps comb her hair out straight, though it would be a pity to spoil those pretty ringlets that look so like sunbeams on her cheek and neck. I don't wonder Mr. Vivian looks at her as if he loved her so. Who could help it? Well, I always thought she and Frank would make a match, but the Almighty fixed it another way."

Aunt Patty paused to take a pinch of snuff out of a new gold snuff-box presented her that morning by Mr. Selwyn. She may be pardoned if she did rap it long and loud and find unusual difficulty in gathering the snuff in her fingers, for it is no wonder she wanted to display such a gift. She then continued her soliloquy, as well satisfied as if her deaf companion shared her thoughts:

"Just to think of Emma, that young thing, marrying a man old enough to be her father! He's a

fine, noble-looking man, though, and carries his head as high as a prince. And he's a kind, good gentleman, too, for he helped to bring me down stairs with his own hands, and then he gave me this fine snuff-box of solid gold all marked and figured up, a present fit for a queen. Poor Victorine! I saw her turn away just now to hide a tear that stands in her eye. She's thinking of Homer, but she loves Edmund, for all that. By and by there will be another wedding, and it won't do any harm to Homer, for he's where there are 'no more marryings and givings in marriage, but where he is like the angels of God in heaven.' I do hope and believe he is. What a strange world this is! Everybody loving and marrying! Well, I think people who live by themselves are the best off, after all, they are so quiet, and then, when the Lord calls them away, they don't leave such a big gap behind them."

At the close of the evening the scrap bed-quilt was produced which had been the admiration of so many eyes, and which Aunt Patty had promised to the niece who should marry first. She was in a dilemma, for both nieces were married at the same time. To be sure, Emma was the eldest, but she

always thought Bessy would be its owner, and she did not like to give up her original opinion.

"I'll tell you what to do, Aunt Patty," said Frank; "keep it for Estelle, who is really the lawful proprietor, for she made it with her own precious little fingers."

Both Emma and Bessy sanctioned the decision of Frank, which they asserted was dictated by the wisdom of Solomon.

"I shall never live to see the dear child married," replied Aunt Patty, shaking her head sorrowfully. "When she wears her bridal robes, I shall be wrapped in my shroud, and nobody will remember anything about poor old Aunt Patty then."

"Don't talk so, Aunt Patty," cried Estelle, her eyes filling with tears; "you know we never can forget you. Besides, I never mean to be married. Emma and Bessy can't love mother half as well as I do, or they never would be willing to go away so far off."

"You will think differently several years hence," said Frank. "I'll wait for you myself if you will promise to marry me when you are old enough. You know how often we have gathered flowers and made charades and conundrums together. You

will never see anybody you will like as well as you do me, Estelle."

"I never expect to," answered she, with a glow of gratitude at the remembrance of his participation in her childish pleasures. "I love you almost as well as I do Edmund. But that isn't the kind of love people feel when they marry each other."

"What kind is that, Estelle?" asked Frank, looking toward the lovely brides.

"I don't know exactly," replied she, blushing at finding herself a poorer metaphysician than she thought she was, "but look at Emma and Bessy and Mr. Selwyn and Mr. Vivian, and see how different they look at each other from what you and I and Aunt Patty do. They take little short looks, and a great parcel of them, but we look and have done with it."

Frank laughed outright. A philosopher could hardly have explained better the difference between the electric glances of love and the calm gaze of friendship.

When he told Estelle to promise to marry him when she was old enough, he only gave utterance to a sportive thought. But as he reflected he grew serious. He thought what a charming thing it would be to be united to a sister of Bessy's who

would be only less beautiful than herself, to make the first impression on her young and innocent heart, to mould the virgin wax of her juvenile affections and stamp upon its softened surface the image of himself.

(One sentence in parentheses: Frank did indeed wait for Estelle, who, when she became older, really supplanted Bessy in the heart of her early admirer.)

And Victorine! Was Aunt Patty a true prophet? Was the tear in her eye for the buried Homer and the smile on her lip for the living Edmund? Yes, it was even so. Memory and hope met in her heart, and while the shadows of the one rolled over its surface, the light of the other tinged them with golden lustre. Never since the death of Homer had Edmund spoken to her otherwise than as a brother might address a sister. They had stood together over his grave when the winds of autumn strewed the mourning leaves on the earth; they had talked of him by the warmth of the winter's fireside and amidst the sweetness of spring's opening flowers. This night they named him not; they spoke of the bridal scene, the morrow's parting and the void that would be made

in the family circle when the newly-married couples had left, perhaps never to return.

"What shall we do without Emma and Bessy?" said Victorine. "Oh, desolate will be the dwelling of Morna," added she, fixing her dark, melancholy eyes on the pale face of Mrs. Worth.

"You must be Emma and Bessy in one," replied Edmund, "and the dwelling where you remain, Victorine, never can be desolate. My mother has no daughter whom she loves better than yourself."

"And yet I have brought her much sorrow," said Victorine, sadly. "I fear I was born to cast a cloud over all who love me."

"A cloud has been resting over us long," said Edmund, in a low voice intended for her ear alone, "but it is in your power to bring back sunshine to our hearts and home."

Victorine blushed. The look he bent upon her was such as she had met beneath the oak of the mountain when passion suddenly rent the veil that covered it and revealed its hidden fires. Her heart thrilled at the remembrance, but hope, in its triumph, soon banished memory.

"Victorine," continued Edmund, "I have loved you in sorrow and remorse when I thought to love

you was a crime. I have loved you in sadness and doubt while I looked upon you as bearing in your bosom a widowed heart. I love you now in hope and faith, and in this scene of wedded happiness I dare to look forward to years of joy with you."

Victorine tried to answer, but the words died on her trembling lips. There was no need, however, of her speaking, for, as Aunt Patty often said, "Victorine had a tongue in her eyes that told everything, whether she willed or no." To quote another of Aunt Patty's sayings, which were almost as celebrated as the proverbs of Solomon: "The Lord had made Edmund and Victorine for each other in his own almightiness, and man could never keep them apart."

The sayings of Aunt Patty are ended—her *scrap-bag* given to the world.

THE END.

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